

T H E  
SCRIPTURE DOCTRINE  
O F  
M I R A C L E S

D I S P L A Y E D :

*Rich<sup>d</sup>* IN WHICH *Barrow.*

Their NATURE,  
Their different KINDS,  
Their POSSIBILITY,  
Their ENDS,

INSTRUMENTS,  
AUTHORITY,  
CRITERION,  
And CONTINUATION,

A R E

Impartially examined and explained, according to the  
Light of Revelation, and the Principles of sound  
Reason.

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By G. H.

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VOLUME I.



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SCRIPTURE DOCTRINE

OF

MIRACLES

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## P R E F A C E.

THE publication of a work on MIRACLES at this time, will, perhaps, be censured as superfluous and unnecessary. Many elaborate treatises on that subject have appeared of late, in the famous dispute about their continuation between Dr Middleton and his learned antagonists: That dispute is still undecided, and the world seems tired of so many different systems as have been published about it, which serve rather to bewilder the imagination, than bring the mind to any settled judgment concerning it. The celebrated Mr Hume, and his free-thinking brethren, have not been wanting to attack the existence of miracles in the most daring manner. Their audacity has served to excite the zeal of several learned friends of Christianity, who have drawn their pens in its defence, and vindicated this darling prerogative of revelation from the sophistry and ridicule employed by those writers to undermine it. After the many excellent things which these gentlemen have said in defence of this cause, it will, perhaps, be thought, that the subject is now exhausted, and that nothing more remains to be said concerning it. A little attention, however, will show, that there is still a great deal to be done. Notwithstanding all that has appeared concerning miracles, the learned themselves don't seem to have formed a

settled conclusive judgment on all points regarding them: And as for others who read, even attentively, the works of those learned writers, I doubt much if they find their minds greatly improved by such reading, or if they feel an interior conviction of truth from their reasonings on the several points relating to miracles which are handled by them.

THIS inconclusiveness of what has been of late published on this important subject, seem to arise chiefly from three causes: First, the several writers on miracles have formed to themselves very different ideas of the word *miracle*; and given us very different definitions, and explications of it: Hence, they set out on opposite principles, and treat of very different subjects, though under the same name; which of necessity renders their reasonings and conclusions different and opposite to one another, and sadly confuses the minds and ideas of their readers.

SECONDLY, There are several points to be examined concerning miracles, in order to have a complete knowledge of that subject. Some of these are more intricate and abstruse, others more plain and easy, which serve as a guide and introduction to the former: But none of the writers on miracles, as far as I have had occasion to see, has considered all these several heads in a full, natural and methodical manner. They generally write upon some one  
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## P R E F A C E.

or other of them by itself, detached from the rest; and in treating this, they too often suppose their readers to be perfectly well acquainted with the ideas they themselves have of all other particulars, and upon which ideas their reasonings are grounded; but as this is very seldom the case, their reasons are thereby rendered more obscure and less conclusive, even where they have truth upon their side; and the minds of the readers become more bewildered and confused, where the author is employed in defence of error.

THIRDLY, Those who have treated this subject as Christians, and in defence of religion, have paid by far too little regard to what the scripture teaches concerning it. The want of scripture proof is mutually objected to one another by Dr Middleton and his opponents. Mr Hume and his party not only discard all connection with the scripture from their side of the question, but would laugh at their adversaries, should they pretend to confute them by the authority of these sacred records. By this means the word of God has been in a manner entirely laid aside in these disputes about miracles: Whereas, miracles being properly the works of the omnipotent, it is chiefly (if not only) from his sacred word that we can be thoroughly instructed concerning them. And indeed it is amazing to consider, what ample information is contained in the word of God on every point relating to these matters; and  
how

how unaccountably this has been neglected and overlooked, even by those Christian authors who have undertaken to write in their vindication.

AN attempt to supply these defects, and to elucidate the Scripture Doctrine of Miracles in all its arts, in a plain, orderly and methodical manner, may be of no small benefit to the cause of religion, and it is hoped, on that account, will not be unacceptable to all those who wish well to Christianity. This is what the author of the following work has endeavoured to do: How far he has succeeded in his endeavours, he leaves to the judgment of his candid readers. He is very sensible of his own great deficiency in point of language and stile; a pleasing kind of argument which the writers against Christian miracles have known how to use with so much success: His chief dependence is upon the goodness of the cause he defends, and the strength of those reasons which support it; and if, even in this, he has not carried his plan to that perfection of which it is capable, he hopes that his attempt may prove the means of inciting some abler hand to prosecute the work, and make up to the full for all his deficiencies.

## CONTENTS

**CONTENTS of the First VOLUME.**

	Page
CHAP. I. <b>O</b> N the Nature of Miracles, according to the Christian Idea of them, and their different Kinds	1
CHAP. II. On the Agency of spiritual Beings in the material Creation	29
CHAP. III. On the Possibility of Miracles	73
CHAP. IV. On the Ends for which Miracles may be wrought, as discovered by Reason	90
CHAP. V. On the general Ends of Miracles, as discovered to us by Revelation	115
CHAP. VI. On other general Ends of Miracles, as discovered by Revelation	150
CHAP. VII. On the particular Ends of Miracles known from Revelation	189
CHAP. VIII. On the Instruments used in performing Miracles	234
CHAP. IX. On the Authority of Miracles	296
CHAP. X. On the Criterion of Miracles	350

ST. MARY'S  
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LOWE HOUSE  
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ST. HELENS



# CONTENTS of the First Volume

Page

CHAP. I. On the Nature of Miracles, and  
according to the Christian Idea

## ERRATA in Vol. I.

CHAP. II. On the Agency of Spiritual Beings

Preface, Page vi, line 6. read *parts*. P. 43.

l. 28. read *the fact*. P. 48. l. 8. read *Totit ui*.

P. 100. l. 24. read *effectually*. P. 116. l. 18. read  
*perfection*. P. 224. l. 4. read *the sincerity*. P.

267. l. 17. read *no esteem for what belongs to him*.

P. 354. l. 9. read *do not force*.

The numbers of the pages from 255. to 264. both  
included, are *twice repeated*.

150

CHAP. VI. On the Nature of Miracles, as discovered by Revelation

CHAP. VII. On the particular Facts of Miracles

180

CHAP. VIII. On the Agency of Spiritual Beings

CHAP. IX. On the Agency of Miracles

240

CHAP. X. On the Agency of Miracles

CHAP. XI. On the Agency of Miracles

CHAP. XII. On the Agency of Miracles

THE  
SCRIPTURE DOCTRINE  
OF  
MIRACLES DISPLAYED.

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CHAP. I.

*On the Nature of MIRACLES, according to the  
Christian Idea of them, and their different kinds.*

I. **W**E find a very great variety among the  
learned in the definitions given by them  
of a *Miracle*: Some consider only the effect pro-  
duced, and define the word accordingly, telling us,  
That as “ effects produced by the regular ope-  
‘ ration of the laws of nature, are called *natural*;  
‘ so effects contrary to this settled constitution and  
‘ course of things, are *miraculous*.” Others in  
defining a *Miracle* include the producing cause,  
without which, they imagine, we cannot have a  
proper idea of what a *Miracle* is. A true *Mi-  
racle*, says Le Moine, “ is a sensible, unusual  
‘ operation or effect above the natural ability or  
A ‘ inherent

‘ inherent power of natural agents ; that is, of all-  
 ‘ created beings ; and therefore performable by  
 ‘ God alone.” Some confine their notion of the  
 producing cause to God only, as in Le Moine’s  
 definition ; others admit for true *Miracles* what  
 may be performed by created beings of a superior  
 nature to man. Thus Mr Chubb, defining what  
 he takes to be meant by *Miracles*, expresses him-  
 self as follows : “ This term, I think, is used to  
 ‘ express a sensible effect, which is above the na-  
 ‘ tural ability or inherent power of man to cause  
 ‘ or produce ; which is likewise above, or besides,  
 ‘ the ordinary course of nature, and which also is  
 ‘ produced by the agency or co-operation of an  
 ‘ invisible being.” Dr Chandler, in his discourse  
 on the nature and use of *Miracles*, gives a very  
 singular definition of them, and says that only is a  
*Miracle*, “ where the action exceeds the utmost  
 capacity of the agent.”

We find another source of this difference a-  
 mong these writers, about the nature of a *Miracle*,  
 from the different ideas they form of what is na-  
 tural, and what is supernatural : According to  
 Le Moine, the word *nature* and *natural* is the  
 same as *creation* and *created*, and consequently  
 nothing is supernatural, in his opinion, but what  
 immediately belongs to, or is done by God alone :  
 Others confine the words *nature* and *natural* to  
 the material creation only, and consequently  
 give



give the term *supernatural* to the operations of spiritual created beings, as well as to those of the Creator, as we have seen in the definition of a *Miracle* given by Mr Chub: Others again use these terms in their definition, without explaining at all whether they take them in the one sense or the other. Thus the Bishop of St David's, in his vindication of the *Miracles* of our Saviour, says:

"A true *Miracle* is properly a *supernatural* operation, disagreeing with and repugnant to the usual course of things, and the known laws of nature, either as to the subject-matter, or the manner of its performance." Many of our

latest writers on this subject give a more vague and undeterminate definition of *Miracles*, calling them "effects unusual above human power, and manifesting the interposition of superior power."

According to Mr Locke, no more seems requisite to the being of a *Miracle*, than that it should appear so to the spectator; for he calls it "a sensible operation, which exceeds the capacity of the spectator, and which he believes to be contrary to the course of nature, and judges to be di-

vine." Mr Hume, with his *vaunted precision*, says: *A Miracle may be accurately defined, a transgression of a law of nature by a particular volition of the Deity, or by the interposition of some invisible Agent.* Ess. on Mir. P. 182. And, in another place, he calls it *a violation of the usual course of nature.* Finally, to cite no more,

“ Every sensible deviation from, or contradiction  
‘ to the known laws of nature, must be an evi-  
‘ dent and incontestible *Miracle*,” says Mr Far-  
mer, P. 21.

II. Whoever considers attentively these several definitions, will easily perceive the very different ideas they convey to the mind. It is not my intention to examine their respective merit or demerit. Some of the above-named gentlemen have already endeavoured to expose the defects of those not given by themselves, while the definitions laid down by them have not escaped the censure of their opponents. This great difference, however, among writers on this subject, about their notions and ideas of *Miracles*, is one plain cause of the many different systems that have been erected about *Miracles*, and of the amazing disagreement between them; and it is surely a matter of no small surprise, that so many great men should so widely disagree in their notions of a subject, which has now for ages been a matter of disquisition among the learned. For this, however, various reasons may be assigned, as will appear to any one who peruses their writings with attention. Some seem to have been prejudiced in favours of some pre-conceived hypothesis, and to have adopted only such a notion of *Miracles* as was suitable thereto: Some seem to have considered the subject only in a partial manner,  
which

which behoved to render their ideas very defective ; and others seem to have failed in not sufficiently distinguishing their own ideas, and assigning a precise meaning to the terms they use ; and hence in their writings these terms occurring in different significations, of necessity make the doctrine they advance dark and obscure. Wherefore, that I may avoid as much as possible these defects, I propose first to take a view of the things themselves which are the subject-matter of *Miracles*, and also of the agents by whom *Miracles* are performed ; and, in doing this, to give a precise explication of the terms that properly belong to this subject ; from all which the definition of a *Miracle*, according to the Christian sense of the word, will naturally flow.

III. 1. The works of God, which more or less fall under our observation and experience, are all comprehended in this visible and material creation : Of this some parts are more immediately subjected to the examination of our senses, as the earth on which we dwell and all things upon it ; others, being at a distance, as the heavenly bodies, we know only by observation, and argue about them chiefly by calculation and analogy. To this whole complex of the material visible creation, we give the name of *nature*.

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To  
LOWE HOUSE  
HELENS



2. To all those parts of nature which fall under our immediate inspection, we find from experience that the Creator has given certain powers or forces, which, when applied to action in their proper circumstances, produce certain determinate effects. Thus the power of gravity makes bodies near the earth tend towards its center; the rays of the sun falling upon the earth produce heat and light; the seeds of vegetables sown in a proper soil, after a certain time, produce plants and trees; food taken into animal bodies nourishes and strengthens them; the annual motion of the earth round the sun makes the different seasons of the year; its diurnal motion round its own axis causes day and night; and so on of others. Now, as all these powers of created nature are found by observation to act in a constant uniform manner, and, when placed in exactly the same circumstances, produce always the same determinate effects; if we inquire whence this uniform connection between natural created causes and their effects can arise, we must at last resolve it into the will of the Creator. It is true, in many particular cases we may observe a mechanical fitness between the cause and its effect, as in the mechanism of a watch or of a clock; yet, if we push our inquiry farther, and ask whence these mechanical powers come to act in such and such a manner, we must at last end in the will of the supreme Author of nature, than which no other reason can be assigned.

ed. Thus, in examining the powers of gravity and attraction; the sensations excited in our mind by the actions of external bodies on the organs of our senses; why the rays of the sun occasion light and heat, and in numberless other cases, we can see no mechanical connection between the cause and its effects, and therefore must attribute this constant uniformity between them to the will of the Creator impressed upon them at the creation by way of a law. This the learned world considering, has justly given the general term of *the laws of nature* to those constant uniform rules, by which natural causes in certain circumstances never fail to produce certain determinate effects.

3. When any being in this visible creation exerts its natural powers, and produces the effects proper to them, it is called a *natural agent*. If it be necessarily applied to action, without any free-will of its own to suspend its operations at pleasure, it is called a *necessary agent*. If it is endowed with free-will, and can *act*, or *not act*, by its own choice, it is called a *free agent*. Fire, for example, is a *necessary agent*, because it has no free-will nor choice in its operations, but of necessity burns and consumes the fuel laid upon it. Man, on the contrary, is a *free agent*, because he is not necessitated in performing these operations that are proper to him, but may or may not perform them as he pleases.

4. We

4. We learn from experience, that among the several powers or forces observed in different creatures, some are stronger than others; and when two unequal powers meet in opposition to one another, the weaker is overcome; and that law of nature, by which it would otherwise have produced its proper effect, is suspended by the superior power acting against it. Thus, though by the laws of gravity a stone is always drawn towards the center of the earth, and, if left to itself at a certain distance from the earth, would immediately fall down towards it; yet, if a superior force to that of gravity in the stone be applied to it, from the strength of a man's hand, for example, or of gun-powder, it may be made to fly upwards from the earth by a motion diametrically opposite in its direction to that which the laws of gravity produce; which *laws* of gravity are in this case said to be *suspended*, as to the external effect visibly produced in the motion of the stone; by laws of a superior force applied in opposition to them. Numberless other examples might be brought of the same thing, by which it appears that the powers or forces given by the Almighty to different creatures have in each a certain degree of strength only, and that they may be hindered from producing their proper effects, or even quite opposite effects be produced in them, by stronger and opposite powers acting against them; or, which comes to the same thing, that the laws  
of



of nature, by which these powers produce their effects, may be suspended for a time by contrary and stronger laws acting in opposition to them.

5. A *suspension of the laws of nature*, or to *suspend the laws of nature*, are expressions very commonly made use of by writers on *Miracles*; but perhaps it would convey a clearer and more precise idea to the mind, were we to call it a *suspension of the usual effects of these laws*. These expressions may be understood of two things; for they may either imply a temporary *annihilation* or *destruction* of the very power itself in the agent, or they may only mean the preventing of the sensible effect of that power, while the power itself remains intire. It is in this last sense only in which it seems necessary to use these expressions for the purpose of *Miracles*; the former signification is not, in fact, always true, nor is it at all requisite to suppose it for understanding this matter: when, therefore, I say that the laws of gravity are suspended when the stone is made to fly upwards, I do not mean that the power of gravity is annihilated in the stone; I know it still continues to exert its usual force in opposition to the power acting against it, but only that its sensible effect of making the stone move towards the center of the earth is superseded or suspended for the time, and a contrary effect produced

produced in it, by means of the superior power which opposes and overcomes it.

6. The above observations on the *laws of nature*, and on the different degrees of strength bestowed on different creatures by Almighty God, and subservient to these laws, holds universally true in all those parts of nature which fall immediately under our examination, and in those also which are at a distance from us, as far as our observations can discover concerning their actions and motions. If, therefore, from this we argue by analogy, it is most reasonable to conclude, that all the other parts of nature, without exception, however remote from our eye, are governed in the same manner; *that is*, by certain fixed and constant laws, by which their powers, operations, and effects, are all regulated and determinated, according to the views and ends which their sovereign Author had in creating them; and that the forces and powers impressed by him on all the different parts of the material creation, differing from one another in degree of strength, the natural effects of the weaker forces must be superseded and suspended when a greater power acts in opposition to them. If, therefore, we gradually ascend from the weaker to the stronger powers, or from the weaker to the stronger laws, by which the operations of these powers are settled and regulated, we must at last arrive at such powers and laws as are  
superior

superior to the strength of all corporeal or natural agents whatever, and whose effects can be suspended only by beings of a superior nature to this material creation.

7. That there are, amongst the works of God, spiritual beings of a superior nature to man, is by no means contrary to reason; nay, it is most reasonable to suppose that such beings exist; and revelation not only assures us of their existence, but also discovers to us several particulars concerning them, to the knowledge of which unassisted reason could never have attained; namely, that these spirits, at their first creation, were placed for a time in a state of trial; that part of them, preserving their fidelity, were confirmed in happiness, and are now in full enjoyment of the presence of God, and employed by him in executing his sacred commands throughout the rest of the creation: that others, revolting against their Creator, their crime was immediately followed by its punishment; they were instantly degraded from their high station, banished from the face of God, and condemned to eternal torments; that both the one and the other possess many qualities and powers of a very superior kind to man, or to any thing to be met with in the material creation, both as to knowledge, strength, and agility; and that they can produce effects in the inferior creation contrary to all the stated laws of nature, and superior to the force of any



any natural agent whatsoever; that they have a nature peculiar to themselves, and that they are governed by laws adapted to their spiritual nature, and very different from those by which matter and motion are regulated in this material creation, with which we are acquainted. It would, therefore, occasion a great confusion of ideas to include both the spiritual and material creation under the general name of *nature*, as their respective natures, and the laws by which they are governed, are, without all doubt, extremely different. Wherefore, to distinguish them properly, we have confined the word *nature* to the whole complex of this material creation, of which we are a part, and with which we are acquainted; and as spiritual beings are much superior to man in their qualities and powers, we give them the name of *supernatural beings*; when we consider them as acting in our lower world, we call them *supernatural agents*; and the effects produced by them in nature we call *supernatural effects*. But as these spiritual beings have a nature peculiar to themselves, and qualities and powers proper to their spiritual natures, when speaking of their several qualities and powers, we are obliged, from the scantiness of language, to apply the word *natural* to them also, meaning those particular properties which are essential to them, or necessarily belonging to their spiritual natures.

8. The effects produced by supernatural agents, in this material creation, may be conceived to be of two kinds; for they may be *supernatural* either as to the manner only of doing them, which must be always the case; or, both as to the matter itself, or the thing performed, as well as to the manner of performing it. If the effect produced be such as exceeds the abilities of all natural agents, then it must be supernatural, both as to the *matter* and *manner*; for example, if a man should walk upon the water without any visible cause supporting him, but invisibly supported by an angel, here the *effect* produced by the angel is *supernatural*, being contrary to all the laws of gravity, which require that the heavy body of a man should sink in water; and the *manner of doing it is supernatural* also, as being done by the ministry of a *supernatural agent*. But if the effect produced be such as may be procured by natural means, and only, in the present case, is done in a manner superior to the abilities of any natural agent, then it will be *supernatural in the manner only*: a man may *naturally* acquire the knowledge of what is done in the most distant parts of the world, but it requires time, and proper information to be brought him by other men from these parts, in order to acquire it; so that this acquisition of knowledge is a *natural effect*, which may be procured by *natural means*; but if an angel, from his great agility, should come, almost instantaneously, from some distant

tant parts, and inform any man of what was doing there, almost at the very instant in which it was done, this acquisition of knowledge would be *supernatural*, not in the thing done, but in the *manner only of doing it*.

9. It is not necessary that every supernatural operation or effect should always consist in, or imply a suspension of any of the laws of nature; a suspension of any of these laws necessarily supposes the existence of some positive law, and of some real force or power, whose effects are superseded by such suspension. Now, numberless effects may be produced in nature by supernatural agents, which do not suspend the effects of any positive law, but only require a power to perform them superior to the abilities of any natural agent. Even man, by his natural abilities, can perform many operations in the creatures about him, and produce many effects in them, without contradicting or suspending any positive law of nature; much more may we suppose supernatural beings capable of doing so also. In the case above-mentioned of an angel communicating to any man, almost instantaneously, the knowledge of what is doing in the most distant parts of the world, there is no positive law of nature suspended, no effects of any real force of natural agents superseded, but an effect produced by the angel, which, as to its manner, there is no natural agent capable of performing. In like manner,



ner, should Almighty God, in a moment, infuse into any man the knowledge of all sciences, or the power of speaking all languages, these effects would not be contrary to any positive law of nature, nor would they imply a suspension of the effects of any power in nature; but it is plain, they would be the effects of a power superior to that of any natural agent, as it is certain there is no power in nature capable of communicating the instantaneous knowledge of these things to man, without his taking time, and using the ordinary means of study to acquire it. Of the same nature, also, is the raising a person from the dead, in which there is no positive law of nature contradicted, no effects of any natural power suspended; but, as in the former cases, a new effect is produced out of the ordinary course of nature, and above the power of all natural agents to perform. Numbers of other cases of the like kind will occur to every intelligent reader; all which we shall call *effects produced out of, or besides, the usual course of nature*, to distinguish them from those which consist in a *suspension of any of its laws*.

10. However great the strength of created supernatural agents may be, it has its limits, beyond which it cannot go. How far it can reach in operating on the material creation, it is impossible for us to determine: it would seem more probable that no created agent could suspend those greater laws of

nature, by which the general frame of this universe is sustained; for to what purpose give them a power which they will never have an occasion of exercising as long as the world shall endure? And when the final dissolution comes, it seems altogether more becoming that the same Almighty Word, which at first enacted these laws, should by himself annul them. Perhaps there may even be many other laws of nature besides those more universal ones, to suspend which exceeds the strength of any created agent; and as for those effects which are *out of the usual course of nature*, certain it is that there must be numberless such producible in the material creation, which can only be performed by the Almighty hand of the Creator, who, as he made all creatures at the beginning, and gave them each their respective natures, qualities, and powers, so alone can dispose of them as he pleases; alter their natures, deprive them of their powers, change them one into another, or annihilate them intirely, as he thinks proper; and can do numberless things in the material creation, which no created power can effectuate. Effects of this kind are all supernatural with regard to us; and, indeed, are so in the most extensive signification of the word: but when we have occasion to speak of them as distinct from the operations of supernatural created agents, we shall call them *divine*.

From

IV. From these observations on nature and its laws, on the several kinds of effects producible in nature, and on the agents that may produce them, it will be no difficult matter to ascertain the proper sense which ought to be affixed to the word *Miracle*. When we see any of the *known laws* of nature *suspended* by the force of a superior *known* law acting against it; for example, when we see a stone thrown upwards by a man's hand, or when we see any effect produced for which we know an adequate natural cause, this does not surprise us, because we see a sufficient natural cause of the effect produced. But were we to see any of the *known laws* of nature *suspended*, without perceiving any cause capable of doing so; for example, were we to see a stone rise of itself from the earth, and fly upwards, or did we see any new effect produced, but were totally ignorant of any natural cause capable of producing it; for example, if one who never saw nor heard of an eclipse, should hear an astronomer fortel, that on such a day, at such an hour, the sun would become dark, and continue so for a certain time; and if he should find this prediction literally fulfilled at the time appointed; in such cases as these we should be filled with wonder and admiration; this being an affection of the mind, which always rises when we see any extraordinary effect produced, and are ignorant of an adequate cause producing it. Now, as the word *Miracle*, according to its etymology, signifies a won-



*derful thing*, or a thing that *causes wonder*; hence, in its most general sense, it may be used to signify all cases of this kind, whether natural or supernatural; and, in this more loose and general signification, it is not unfrequently used in common conversation, where, in relating or hearing any thing extraordinary or unusual, one is very apt to say, *it is a Miracle—it is miraculous*! without ever adverting whether it may arise from natural causes or not. But this is not the sense in which it is used when we speak with precision; and if we examine the idea we have of it when we mean a *Miracle properly such*, and which seems most agreeable to the general sentiments of the Christian world, we shall find the following observations hold true of it:

1. That it implies an operation, or an effect produced, in this *material creation*, consequently capable of being known to some one or other of our senses; so that the material sensible creation, to which we give the name of *nature*, is the subject matter in which miracles are performed.

2. That this effect must be *extraordinary*; that is, either directly *contrary* to the known laws of nature, and to the natural powers and forces in the creatures, which are regulated and determined by those laws, or, that it be *besides* the usual course of nature, either as to the effect itself produced,

duced, or the manner of producing it. We need only reflect upon our own mind, and we will easily see, that the moment we conceive that any event, however uncommon it may seem, may arise from natural causes, or is conformable to the usual course of nature, we immediately lose the idea of its being a miracle.

3. That this operation or effect not only be performed by a supernatural agent, but also that we be persuaded there is no natural agent capable of performing it, at least as to the manner in which it is done; for here also we find, on reflecting on what passes within us, that our idea of the miraculous in any event, however extraordinary it may appear, immediately begins to cease the moment we suspect that it may be performed by natural agents.

4. That this supernatural agent be either God himself, or his holy angels commissioned by him. In the Christian theology, there is no doubt, but the devil and his wicked spirits can, by that strength and abilities which are natural to them, perform many extraordinary things in the material creation; yet certain it is, as the same theology assures us, and as we shall afterwards see in its proper place\*, that Almighty God will never permit them to exert this power in such a manner as that their operations

\* See Chap. X. on the Criterion.

ration could not be distinguished from those of God himself, or of his good angels. One idea which the Christian world has constantly affixed to miracles, is, that they are the seal and language of God, by which he speaks to the heart of man; and it has always been convinced that God never will permit Satan so to usurp this seal, or so, to speak in this language, as to be undiscoverably taken for God himself; but that all the extraordinary operations he is ever permitted to perform in the material world, are either in the things done, the end proposed, or the manner of performing them, attended with such circumstances as evidently manifest the source from whence they flow. This firm persuasion is solidly grounded upon the prediction of our Saviour, of the extraordinary signs and wonders that will be performed towards the end of the world by false Christs and false prophets, through the agency of Satan, whose ministers these are, and which signs, he tells us, will be so many and so great at that time, *as to lead (if it were possible) even the elect into error*, Matth. 22. which expression evidently shows, that though those *signs and wonders* will be exceeding great, yet their delusion will not be undiscoverable, but that the elect will discover it, and will not be deceived by them. Now, so strongly is it impressed in the idea Christians have of miracles, that they are the work of God, or of his good angels only, that as soon as they suspect any extraordinary event to be the work of Satan, they immediately



immediately lose all thought of it as a miracle. They call it a prestige, an illusion, a prodigy, an enchantment, and the like; or, as such operations are emphatically termed in the holy writ, *lying signs and wonders*; but their notion of a miracle is only conceived of such extraordinary effects as they believe to be the work of God, or of good angels commissioned by him.

V. These observations being premised, the definition of a miracle, according to the Christian idea of the word, naturally follows, namely that it is "an extraordinary effect produced in the material creation, either *contrary to the known laws of nature, or besides the usual course of nature, above the abilities of natural agents, and performed either by God himself, or by his holy angels.*"

VI. It is true that words are but arbitrary signs, and every one is at liberty to affix what idea he pleases to any word he uses, provided he explains his meaning, so that he may be understood. I am, therefore, far from blaming any other writer who has given us an idea of the word *Miracle*, different from what I have here laid down. If he understood that word, according to the idea he gives of it, why not? And, for this reason I have abstained from examining the several definitions given of miracles by others, and from pointing out what

may

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may be thought defective or praise-worthy in them. But as the miracles which belong to the Christian religion, are real things which have actually existed in the world, they must have some properties peculiar to themselves, by which we can conceive an idea of them, and by which they can be distinguished from what they are not. These properties I have endeavoured to investigate, according to what seems to have been the most universally received notion of the Christian world about them, and the most conformable to the doctrine of the holy scriptures, as will appear more fully afterwards; and from these properties I have composed my definition of the word *Miracle*, as here laid down. If this definition be exact, and such as conveys to the mind an adequate idea of what is meant by a *Miracle*, according to the Christian revelation, then it must follow of course, that those writers who have assigned to that word different significations, comprehending other things than what Christianity understands by it, or being defective in what the scripture idea of it contains, have not had Christian miracles for the subject of their inquiries, but ideas of their own, which perhaps have no real object existing that corresponds to them. Thus, when Mr Hume gives us his idea of a miracle, and tells us, " That a miracle  
' may be accurately defined, a *transgression* of a  
' law of nature, by a particular volition of the  
' Deity, or by the interposal of some invisible  
' agent."

‘agent;’ it is evident, that, in this sense of the word, there is no such thing as a miracle existing, or possible to exist; for, as Dr Campbell justly observes, the word *transgression* invariably denotes a *criminal opposition to authority*; this God Almighty is here represented as guilty of in working a miracle, which is an evident impossibility. Also, if the miracle be wrought by an invisible created agent, in doing it this agent is always guilty of a crime, of an opposition to the divine will. What monstrous absurdities must necessarily follow from such ideas of a miracle as these are! If, therefore, Mr Hume, or others who have substituted for miracles the ideas of their own fancy, which have no corresponding object in nature, have from these drawn conclusions about miracles which the Christian religion abhors and condemns, we need not be surprised: these conclusions may naturally flow from the principles they have laid down, but Christianity cannot be affected by them: For, though these writers insidiously use the same word *Miracle* to denote their ideas, as Christians do to denote real miracles; yet, as what the former mean by it is so widely different from what the Christian revelation understands by that word, it is plain that their reasonings and conclusions cannot in the least degree affect Christian miracles, or Christianity.

VII. Before



VII. Before I leave this subject, I must observe, for the further illustration of the above definition of a miracle, that there are some Christian authors of no small note, who have defined that word in a more limited manner than I have done, excluding all created agents, and understanding by it only such extraordinary operations as require the arm of the Almighty to perform them. Their reasons are two; first, that when an angel performs any thing unusual to us in this material creation, it is no less conformable to nature than if it were to be done by a man; nor is it in the least surprising or wonderful to those spiritual beings, who see and know the cause performing it; for the angel in this case only acts according to his natural power, and produces an effect naturally corresponding thereto. Secondly, because the sacred scripture expressly attributes miracles to God only. Thus, Psal. lxxii. 18. *Blessed be the Lord the God of Israel, who only doth wonderful things.* Also, Psal. lxxxvi. 10. *For thou art great, and doest wondrous things; thou art God alone.* Again, Psal. cxxxvi. 4. *To him who alone doth great wonders: for his mercy endureth for ever.* Add to these, Eccles. xi. 4. *The works of the Highest only are wonderful.* Hence they conclude, that those operations only are to be admitted as miracles which are peculiar to Almighty power, and can be done by none but God. But it does not appear from these reasons, that this is the idea the Christian world

world has always had, of miracles, or even that this is the real notion which the scripture itself gives of them. For, according to this limited sense of the word, several remarkable effects related as miraculous in the scripture, and yet performed by angels, and many others evidently within the power of angels, which fully answer all the purposes of miracles, would be intirely excluded from being looked upon as miracles; nor could they be esteemed as such. It would doubtless be thought a very great miracle, should a man stand in the fire and not be touched by it, as was the case with the three children in the fiery furnace, and yet the scripture declares that this was done by the ministry of an angel; in like manner the deliverance of Daniel from the hungry lions is justly esteemed miraculous, and yet that prophet himself declared, that *God had sent his angel and shut up the lions' mouths that they had not power to hurt him.* Now, both these miracles produced the full effects intended by them, in convincing two heathen princes that Almighty God alone was the supreme Lord and Master of all things, as much as if they had been the immediate operation of God himself; yet they, as well as numbers of others, cannot be admitted as miracles, if the above limited sense of that word be adopted. However, as there is doubtless a very great difference between any operation which can be performed by the ordinary ability of any created agent, and such as can only

be done by the Almighty hand of the Creator, it is most reasonable to make a distinction between them; and we shall afterwards see that it is necessary to observe this distinction, especially when we come to consider the *criterion of Miracles*; wherefore, to those miraculous operations which can be performed by *created agents*, we shall give the name of *relative Miracles*; because, though they be *real Miracles* with relation to man, superior to the utmost abilities of all natural agents, and quite out of the ordinary course of nature in this material creation; yet they are not so with relation to the angels, but to them are effects produced by an adequate cause, which in that order of beings is altogether *natural*; and those miracles which can be performed by none but God we shall call *absolute Miracles*, because they are real miracles with relation to all creatures, and above the natural abilities of all created beings whatsoever. This plain and obvious distinction will fully answer the argument brought above from reason, in order to prove that nothing ought to be esteemed a miracle but what requires an almighty power to perform it; and to reconcile the scripture with itself, in answer to those texts above-cited, which attribute the working of wonderful things to God alone, while at the same time the depriving fire of its power to burn, and the shutting up the mouths of furious lions (both which are surely most wonderful things, and yet) are by the same scriptures attributed



attributed to the agency of angels; we must say, either that the above-mentioned texts speak only of *absolute Miracles*, which are peculiar to God alone, or, if both kinds are to be understood, the meaning is, that God alone doth wonderful things, either immediately by his own hand, or by the ministry of his holy angels, who never do any such wondrous things but when commissioned and authorized by him to do so.

VIII. We shall now conclude this explication of the nature of miracles, by taking a view of their different kinds, which will easily appear from the description we have here given of them.

*First*, then, if we consider the nature of the miraculous effect performed, we find two kinds of miracles specifically different in this respect from one another; the one being a suspension of some of the known laws of nature; and those of this kind we call *Miracles contrary to the laws of nature*, because they are effects produced quite contrary to what those laws require. Miraculous effects of the other kind not being contrary to any of these laws, but being new or unusual operations performed in nature beyond the abilities of any natural agent, we call *Miracles out of, or besides, the ordinary course of nature*.

*Secondly*, If we consider the miraculousness itself which enters into these operations, this will give us two other kinds of miracles no less distinct than the former, *to wit*, such as are altogether miraculous and supernatural, both in the *thing done* and in the *manner of doing it*; and such as are miraculous and supernatural only in the *manner of performing it*, but where the thing itself is natural, and may be brought about by natural means.

*Thirdly*, If we consider the agents by whom miracles are wrought, we shall find another division of them into *relative Miracles*, which can be performed by the natural ability of supernatural created agents, and *absolute Miracles*, which exceed all created powers, and can be done by none but the great Creator.

## CHAP. II

## CHAP. II.

*On the Agency of SPIRITUAL BEINGS in the  
Material Creation.*

I. **B**EFORE we proceed to other particulars concerning miracles, it will be necessary to consider what idea the holy scriptures give us of the powers of supernatural created beings in acting upon matter, and of their agency in this world. The knowledge of this will still more illustrate the explication we have given of miracles, and will facilitate our understanding of the doctrine contained in those sacred writings concerning them. I observed above, that it is from revelation alone that we know for certain the existence of spiritual beings, and consequently it is only from the same source that all we can possibly know about their nature, qualities, powers, and operations, can be drawn. It is, therefore, unjustifiable in the adversaries of Christianity, wantonly to deny the existence of such beings, or, at least, that they have any communication with the affairs of men; and, from this ungrounded supposition, pretend to ridicule, and argue against Christianity and its miracles: For, if the existence and agency of spirits in nature be the manifest doctrine of the



holy scriptures, it is altogether unreasonable in them to deny this doctrine, while they cannot disprove the divinity of those sacred writings which contain it. It is no less unjustifiable in certain pretended friends of Christianity, to alledge, that what the holy fathers and primitive Christians taught concerning the agency of spiritual beings in the material creation, was *solely* owing to their attachment to the heathen mythology, and was the remains of what they had believed about dæmons before their conversion; whereas, we not only find, that what they taught concerning spirits was intirely conformable to the holy scriptures, but that these very scriptures are brought by them to prove this doctrine, and are the sources from whence they profess to draw it. It is still more unjustifiable in Christians themselves, who receive the sacred scripture as divine truths, to call in question what is there clearly delivered concerning spiritual beings and their agency in nature, and to pervert the plain and obvious meaning of the text on this subject, rather than give up some favourite preconceived opinion of their own, or the darling pretence of being above what they call the prejudices of vulgar minds, and of being men of superior wit and greater strength of mind than the rest of mankind. A plain view of what is contained in the word of God, will at once show the folly of such a behaviour.

II. The

II. The belief of the agency of spiritual beings in the material world, has had various fates within these last two hundred years. About the beginning of the reformation, when the Roman Catholics urged the invincible weight of miracles wrought in their communion, as proofs of the truth of what they taught, and consequently as the strongest confutation of the tenets of the reformation; the first reformers, who had not yet found out Dr Middleton's expeditious answer to all pleas of this kind, and who could not deny the reality of the facts alledged, did not hesitate to attribute them all to the agency of Satan, and willingly allowed a most unbounded power of this kind, even to wicked spirits, during what they called the *reign of Papacy*. Some time after, when Deism and Freethinking became more prevalent, and formed a very numerous body, the gentlemen of that persuasion found it very inconvenient for their system to admit the belief of devils at all; for *devils, hell, eternity*, and the like, are extremely incompatible with the main articles of their belief, and still more so with their morality; these tenets, therefore, were altogether discarded by them, and they intirely resolved all miracles into juggling tricks, and human imposture. But this plea being unable to support itself to the full satisfaction of all serious inquirers, some of them have thought fit to shift that ground; and seeing, on the one hand, many miraculous effects alledged, which could not possibly

possibly be attributed to the art of man; and, on the other hand, not being able to find any colour of reason absolutely to deny the possibility of supernatural agents, have gladly admitted this possibility, and from it pretend to invalidate the authority of miracles in general, even those of Jesus Christ himself, and of his holy apostles. For, say they, how do we know but that all miracles, without exception, may only be the work of different genii or dæmons, of whom there may be many different degrees? And, if the things done be some more and some less wonderful, this may only be owing to the greater or less degree of strength in the assisting dæmon. Thus, if Moses performed greater miracles than the magicians of Pharaoh, it only shows that his invisible helper was of a higher order than their's; and if the miracles of Jesus Christ were above all that had ever been seen in the world before him, it was owing only to the superior abilities of his assisting genius. Now, say they, as this is possible, it may be true, and all miracles may be the work of dæmons; and if this be the case, in vain do we appeal to miracles as interpositions of the Deity, and proofs of doctrines revealed by him. The futility of this way of arguing will afterwards be seen, and indeed is a natural consequence of what shall be shewn upon the authority and criterion of miracles. At present I shall only observe, that these various opinions concerning the existence and agency of spiritual beings in this material creation,



creation, shew clearly that their respective abettors have no solid ground to stand upon; that they adopt these sentiments only at random, and as fancy prompts them; or, at best, that they are forced to embrace them in support of the different systems in which they have been previously engaged, but without ever taking the pains to consult the only certain source from whence they can be fully informed about these matters, and, indeed, without much minding whether their opinions be conformable to what is there taught or not. There is still another system about the agency of spiritual beings, lately set forth with great pomp by Mr Farmer, differing from all the former. In this it is pretended, that though these beings be of a superior nature to man, and may possess, for any thing we know, many qualities and powers of a much more excellent kind than we do, yet their exertion of these powers is limited to their own particular spheres of action for which they are adapted; that they naturally have no power to act in the material creation; and that, when Almighty God is at any time pleased to employ them as his agents in performing any thing miraculous among men, it is not enough that he order or authorize them to do so, but it is also necessary that he impart to them a particular power, extraordinary, and otherwise not competent to their nature, to enable them to perform what he so commands.

III. In confutation of these, and all other such self-assumed hypotheses concerning these matters, it will be sufficient to display the doctrine of the holy scriptures in their own words, where we shall find the following truths clearly and plainly declared to us by the authority of God himself.

1. That spiritual beings, whether good or bad angels, have in their own natures an inherent power to act in this material creation; that they can move, dispose of, and affect bodies in many different ways; and that their strength is exceeding great, far superior to any thing we know or can conceive in this world; so that they are capable of performing numbers of things, truly miraculous in our eyes, and far above the abilities of all natural agents. 2. That evil spirits have an implacable hatred both to God and man; and in consequence of this are most desirous of themselves to exert this their natural strength, for the hurt and destruction of man, and to perform great signs and wonders, in order, by their means, the more effectually to delude and deceive him. 3. That, however, in the present dispensation of Providence, their malice is very much restrained by Almighty God, who never allows them to exert their natural abilities for the hurt of mankind, but only in such manner and degree as he pleases, for his own wise ends and purposes; to wit, either for the good of mankind, according to the views of his mercy, or for the punishment of their sins, according

ding to the order of his justice : and this restraint appears, as we shall afterwards see, both from the nature of the things they are allowed to do, and from the manner and other circumstances attending the doing of them. 4. That good angels have, on many occasions, had communication with men, and have often done remarkable and extraordinary things on their account, and at their desire ; namely, by divine appointment for the benefit and consolation of God's friends and servants. 5. That wicked spirits also have, by God's permission, had frequent communication with men, and have often done extraordinary things at their desire, and by their means, for most wicked ends on their part, although justly and wisely permitted by Almighty God, for his own most righteous views and purposes. Each of these heads we shall now illustrate separately, from the plain declaration of the holy scriptures, and afterwards make a short inquiry into the manner in which spiritual beings have power to do things miraculous in our eyes, in this material world.

IV. As the first of these heads is of the greatest importance, and must be well established, I shall be the more explicit upon it, and show that spiritual beings not only can act upon matter, but that they can act upon all different parts of matter, upon things on the surface of the earth and in the air, upon the bodies of animals, upon their health and



and life, and upon the mind of man ; that they can move bodies, change their parts and appearances, and several other ways dispose of and affect them, and that they have very great strength to do all this. The proofs of this from the holy scripture are of the most convincing kind, and void of all ambiguity, consisting of repeated facts related in these sacred oracles ; by which it is evident, beyond reply, that spirits have this power from their actual exertion of it. With regard to their strength in general, the angels are represented to us as excelling in it : *Bless the Lord*, says the royal prophet, *ye his angels that excel in strength ;* or, as the Hebrew expresses it, *mighty in strength*. Ps. ciii. 20. St Peter assures us, that the *angels are greater in power and might than men*. 2 Peter, ii. 11. and on this account they are called in scripture *Dominations, Virtues, Powers*. This great strength of their's also appears from the force the devils communicate sometimes to those whom they possess : thus we are told in the gospel of one of those possessed people, who *had his dwelling among the tombs, and no man could bind him, no not with chains, because he had been often bound with fetters and chains, and the chains had been plucked asunder by him, and the fetters broken in pieces*. Mark v. Now, that spiritual beings can exert this power by acting upon matter, is evident from the following instances : An angel wrestled with Jacob ; the two angels that were sent to destroy Sodom

Sodom put forth their hand and pulled Lot into the bouse, to deliver him from the fury of the people; and they shut the door, and smote the men that were at the door of the house with blindness, both great and small. Gen. xix. 10. The angel Gabriel several times touched Daniel, and set him upright, when he had fallen flat on the ground with fear. Dan. viii. ix. x. *An angel came down and rolled away the stone, for it was very great, from the door of the sepulchre.* When the apostles were thrown into prison, *the angel of the Lord, by night, opened the prison doors and brought them forth.* Acts v. 19. And the angel that delivered St Peter out of prison, smote him on the side and awakened him. These facts plainly demonstrate that spiritual beings can act upon matter, touch it, move it, and in different ways dispose of it; all which will still further appear from the following examples of the several parts of nature wherein their power has been exercised. 1. In things upon the surface of the earth, we find that the devil turned the rods of the magicians into serpents; turned water into blood, and brought up frogs. This is not the place for inquiring into the manner how this was done; we only consider the fact, which proves to a demonstration the agency of wicked spirits upon material objects, even to a very high degree, in whatever manner the change, whether real or apparent, was effected. The same scripture that relates these facts, relates that they were

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done

done by enchantment, and in opposition to God; they were therefore the operations of wicked spirits. 2. With regard to their agency in the air, we are told that the devil sent a great wind, which threw down the house where Job's children were convened, and destroyed them; and that he sent down fire and lightning from heaven, which consumed Job's sheep and their keepers. From the power which these wicked spirits have in the air, St Paul calls the devil *the prince of the power of the air*. Ephes. ii. 2. And again he says, that our spiritual enemies are *principalities and powers, the rulers of the darkness of this world*. Ephes. vi. 12. 3. We find they can inflict diseases upon the bodies of men; thus *Satan went forth from the presence of the Lord, and smote Job with sore boils, from the sole of his foot unto his crown*. Job ii. 7. And our blessed Saviour himself assures us, that the poor crooked woman whom he cured upon the Sabbath, and who for eighteen years had never been able to raise herself up, had been kept bound for so long a time in this miserable manner by the devil: *Ought not this woman, says he, being a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan hath bound, to these eighteen years! be loosed from this bond on the Sabbath-day?* Luke xiii. 16. Of those people who were possessed by the devil, as related in the gospel, some he made dumb, some deaf, and some he threw into fits, tormenting them most miserably, and endeavouring even to destroy them, by  
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throwing them sometimes into the fire, and sometimes into water. We are also told, that *an angel of the Lord smote Herod, because he gave not glory to God*; and that he died in a few days of a most loathsome disease, *being consumed with worms.*

Acts xii. 4. It further appears, from the same sacred records, that spiritual beings can take away the life of man, and of other animals: thus Satan destroyed Job's children and his cattle; a devil killed Sarah's seven husbands; the destroying angel, in one night's time, killed all the first-born of Egypt, both man and beast. *An angel of the Lord went forth and smote, in the camp of the Assyrians, an hundred and fourscore and five thousand.* Isaiah xxxvii. 36.

The two angels entertained by Lot told him, *we will destroy this place, because the cry of them is waxen great before the face of the Lord, and the Lord hath sent us to destroy it.* Gen. xix.

13. The devils that entered into the herd of swine drowned them all in the sea; and the angel that withstood Balaam's journey declared to him, that he would surely have killed him if the ass had not turned out of the way from him. Num. xxii.

5. That wicked spirits have power and abilities to tempt men to sin, both by external occasions, and by exciting bad ideas in their minds, is, and always has been, a fundamental article of Christian faith most clearly laid down in holy writ. As to external temptations, we find the devil, at the beginning, either taking upon himself the appearance of

a serpent, or entering into that creature, and making use of its organs to converse with Eve; thereby tempting and seducing her to sin. In like manner, when our blessed Saviour was pleased, for our consolation and example, to allow the devil to tempt him, that wicked spirit appeared to him visibly, spoke to him, and carried him up to a pinnacle of the temple, and to the top of a very high mountain; and St Paul, writing to the Thessalonians, says, *We would have come unto you (even I Paul) once and again, but Satan hindered us.* 1 Thes. ii. 18. And on another occasion tells us, that *an angel of Satan was given to buffet him.* With regard to his internal temptations, the scripture tells us, *That he taketh away the word of God out of our hearts.* Luke viii. 12. *That he blinds the minds of them that believe not.* 2 Cor. iv. 4. *That he transforms himself into an angel of light.* 2 Cor. xi. 14. on purpose the easier to deceive us. *That he goes about like a roaring lion seeking to devour us.* 1 Pet. v. 8. *That he is the old serpent, who is called the devil, and Satan who seduces the whole earth.* Rev. xii. 9. These texts are clear, and need no application, but expressly show how great the strength of wicked spirits is, to act upon our organs, both external and internal, and even upon our whole persons. 6. As for the agency of good angels, all the scriptures are full of the most convincing examples of it. Besides what we have seen above, we are assured in these sacred writings,

ings, that these holy *angels are ministring spirits, sent for the ministry of those who are the heirs of salvation.* Heb. i. 14. *That God has given them charge over us to keep us in all our ways, and that they carry us in their hands, lest we dash our foot against a stone.* Psal. xci. *That they encamp round about those that fear God and deliver them.* Psal. xxxiv. *That an angel delivered Jacob from all evil.* Gen. xlviii. *That an angel brought bread and water to Elijah in the wilderness.* 1 Kings xix. That an angel deprived the fire of all its power of burning or touching the three children who were thrown into the fiery furnace by the king of Babylon : That an angel shut up the mouths of the hungry lions, so that they could not hurt Daniel : That an angel delivered St Peter out of prison, before whom the iron gate opened of its own accord, as if sensible of the presence and power of that heavenly being. Now, let any one seriously consider these plain facts, so repeatedly narrated in the word of God, and say, if he thinks it possible to have given more convincing proofs of the great power and strength which these spiritual beings have to act, and do numbers of things in every part of this material creation. For we must observe, that the question here is not, How far the wit of man may wrest any particular expression of scripture, to a sense very opposite to its natural meaning? but, Whether or not the plain, natural, obvious meaning of all the above facts, Does not.



imprint in the mind the strongest conviction of the agency of spiritual beings in this material creation?

Upon the whole, then, I must make the following remarks: 1. That it is a truth plainly and repeatedly revealed by God in his holy scriptures; that spiritual beings, both good and bad angels, have great strength and power to act upon bodies in this material world, in many different ways; and that they often do actually exert this their power in so doing. 2. That this strength is natural to them, and inherent in them as spiritual beings; for, in all the above testimonies of holy writ, this is the obvious idea conveyed to our minds concerning it: there is not the most distant insinuation to the contrary; nay, in many of the above examples, the evil spirits exert their power in opposition to God; and it would be impious to suppose, that in these cases he gives them an extraordinary power, not competent to their natures, to enable them to fight against himself. 3. That it is most shameful for any one who pretends to the name of a Christian to assert, that the doctrines taught by the holy fathers concerning the agency of spirits, are nothing but the remains of heathenism; how little must such pretended Christians be acquainted with the scriptures who say so? or what idea must they have of a Christian world, when they dare to impose such a manifest calumny upon them? 4. That as it is only from Revelation we can know any thing for certain about the existence of spirits, and  
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their agency on material beings; and as revelation is so clear and manifest upon that head, it is most ridiculous in any to pretend to argue from reason against it: reason has no *data* to go upon, either for or against the existence of spirits, or their agency; nay, the analogy from our own soul, and its agency upon the body, is evidently in favours of both; for seeing, by interior consciousness, we have the most feeling conviction that our soul, though a spirit, acts numberless ways upon our body, it is evident from thence that a spirit can act upon matter; and will any one dare to assert, that the only way by which God Almighty can communicate this power to spirits of acting upon bodies, is by uniting them in one principle, as our souls and bodies are? Seeing, then, that the fact itself, *to wit*, that spiritual beings can and do act in numberless ways on the material creation, is so repeatedly revealed and affirmed by the word of God, and that there is not in the whole scripture the least insinuation to the contrary, with what colour of reason can it be called in question, at least by any one who believes the scriptures? That spiritual beings then do act on bodies, is evidently a revealed truth; how they do so we do not comprehend, because God has not been pleased to reveal it to us; but our ignorance of this can be no more a reason for denying a fact, than it would be a reason to deny the action of the soul upon the body, because how this is performed we do not comprehend

comprehend more than we do the other. That one particle of matter acts upon another, even at a distance, by the powers of gravity and attraction, is a point that will readily be allowed by all Newtonian philosophers; and, indeed, it is a fundamental principle of that philosophy. How this comes about, we cannot possibly conceive; those who have attempted to explain this mechanically have only bewildered themselves to no purpose, and have been forced at last to end in the self-same difficulty which they attempted to explain; hence the most judicious, both among divines and philosophers, have resolved this power of attraction, so universally diffused in every particle of matter, to an immediate act of the will of the Creator, impressed upon matter by way of a law; by which it is ordained, that all particles of matter, when within certain distances, should act upon one another by attraction, and produce all the various effects we see consequent thereunto: And is it not equally easy for the same Almighty will to make a similar law between spirits and bodies, that these last should be subjected to the former, and such effects produced in them as spiritual beings should intend and attempt to produce in them? The possibility of this cannot be called in question, even in sound philosophy; and since revelation assures us of the fact itself, it is most unphilosophical to pretend to argue from reason against it; and, upon the whole, we must conclude, that supernatural  
created



created agents have a very ample and extensive power inherent in their natures, and competent to them as spiritual beings, to act upon matter throughout every part of nature ; in consequence of which, they can move bodies, alter their parts, suspend their qualities and natural effects upon one another, and perform numberless operations in them superior to the abilities of all natural agents, and therefore real miracles with respect to us.

V. Having thus solidly established the first of the five heads proposed above to be shown on the present subject, I proceed now to consider the others, which will be sooner discussed ; the second, *to wit*, that evil spirits, from their malice and hatred to God and man, are most desirous to exert their strength for the destruction of man, is in the plainest terms declared to us by the word of God, and is indeed the foundation of some of the most important rules of morality in the Christian religion. Besides what we have said above about the devil's power to tempt man to sin, which is the most effectual way to destroy him, where we have seen how attentive he is in this infernal employment, we are also assured, that *by the envy of the devil death entered into the world.* Wisd. ii. ; and our blessed Saviour himself declares, that *the devil was a murderer from the beginning.* John viii. ; and St Peter compares his rage and fury against us to that of a roaring lion seeking to devour us, continually going

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ing about, and always upon the watch to seize every opportunity of doing so : And our Saviour shows the same thing in another very strong light, when he said to St Peter, *Simon, Simon, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat, but I have prayed for thee.* Luke xxii. 31. and it was only by this prayer that the desire of Satan was disappointed, and his infernal design against the apostles restrained ; all which expressions, together with what we saw above about diabolical temptations, show, beyond reply, how good a will the devil has to ruin and destroy man, both soul and body ; and consequently that he would undoubtedly do so, were not his power restrained by Almighty God, and a bound set to his malice. This restraint put upon the power of Satan, which was the third point mentioned above, is no less plainly delivered in holy writ than the two former. The Egyptian magicians, at whose desire the devil turned the rods into serpents, and water into blood, and even brought up frogs, could not by their enchantments bring up lice : the devil's power was here restrained, and the magicians were forced to confess that this was the finger of God. We see no reason why the devil, by his natural abilities, might not have brought up lice as well as frogs ; the one appears every way as easy to be done as the other, in whatever manner he be supposed to have performed it ; but it was now time for God to show himself master ; and therefore,

fore, though he allowed Satan to imitate the former miracles of Moses, yet he thought proper now to restrain his power, and put an end to the contest, by securing the victory to himself and his holy servant. Notwithstanding the rage and hatred Satan had against Job, which appears from the whole history, and from the manner he treated him when he was allowed to do so, yet, till he was so allowed, he could not so much as touch one thing that belonged to him. And it is to be observed, that when the Lord gave this allowance to Satan, there is not the least hint of giving him any extraordinary strength to enable him to hurt Job, but a plain insinuation of his having sufficient strength already for that purpose; and the authority conveyed to Satan by the expression used by God, is plainly nothing else but leave to exercise his own natural strength, first upon Job's goods, and afterwards upon his person, to his own pleasure: *Behold, saith Almighty God, all that he hath is in thy power, only upon himself put not forth thine hand.* Job. i. 12. And afterwards, *Behold, says God, he is in thine hand, but save his life.* Job ii. 6. In both which expressions, the restricting clause plainly shows the nature of the leave given to Satan, and what he could further have done by his own natural strength, had not that clause been added. In like manner, though the devil killed the seven husbands of Sarah, yet he had no power to touch young Tobias; and when  
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the angel Raphael explained this matter to him, he told him, *Hear me, and I will tell you who those are over whom the devil can prevail; for they who in such manner receive matrimony, as to shut out God from themselves and from their mind, and to give themselves to their lust, as the horse and the mule, which have no understanding; over them the devil hath power.* Job vi. 16, 17. where we see, that it is not any extraordinary access of strength given to Satan, which enables him to hurt men, but our own sins, which depriving us of the friendship of God, and making us slaves of the devil, give him power over us, and permission to exercise his natural strength against us. What our Saviour told St Peter, that *Satan desired to have him, that he might sift him as wheat*, not only shows the rage of that wicked spirit against the servants of God, but at the same time shows how much his power is restrained by the divine providence; he desired it, earnestly desired it, but he could do no more, the execution of this desire being prevented by the prayers of Jesus Christ: Nay, what is still more remarkable, when our Saviour dispossessed the poor man in whom there was a legion of devils, they durst not so much as enter into the herd of swine till they had asked and received leave to do so. Lastly, Our blessed Saviour not only restrains the power of Satan, and sets bounds to his malice himself, but also gave power to his apostles and disciples to do so; for *he gave them*  
power

*power and authority over all devils. Luke ix. 1. And in the following chapter, when they had exercised this power, and found the effects of it, they returned and said to their Master with joy, Lord, even the devils are subject to us through thy name; upon which he renews the grant to them again, saying, Behold I give you power to tread upon serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall by any means hurt you: But to repress all motions of pride or vanity which might arise in their minds on that account, he immediately subjoins, Notwithstanding, in this rejoice not that the spirits are subject unto you, but rather rejoice that your names are written in heaven. Luke x. 17, 19, 20. All which manifestly shows, that in this present dispensation of providence, the devil's power is kept in great restraint, and such a bound set to his malice against man, as best suits the views and designs of the divine wisdom. We come now to consider the fourth point above proposed, concerning the agency of good angels, and their communication with men; but of this we have already seen several manifest examples and declarations from the sacred scripture, in the sixth proof of the first point, to which I refer, and shall only add here one other example, to wit, that of the angel Raphael with Tobias, all which history is a continued train of services done by that holy angel to those good people, several of which, as well as many of the other examples mentioned*

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above, are operations far superior to the power of any natural agent, and therefore truly miraculous in our eyes. We shall now proceed to consider what the scripture teaches us concerning the agency of evil spirits in particular, and their communication with men.

VI. It is a well known truth in the Christian révelation, that the cause of the ruin of the fallen angels was pride; dazzled with their own super-eminent excellencies, they forgot the hand from whom they had received them, and arrogated to themselves that glory which belonged only to their great Creator: Banished out of heaven on this account, and condemned to eternal misery in punishment of their crime, they did not become wiser by their fall, but were rather the more confirmed in their pride, and hardened in that unhappy ambition. To see man, a creature composed of the dust of the earth, and so much inferior to them in the dignity of their nature, created in such a happy state, and destined by the Almighty to fill up those places which they had lost in heaven, was an eye-sore which their pride and envy could not endure; they therefore resolved on his destruction, and unhappily accomplished it. Having by this means brought man in subjection to themselves, and being continually pushed on by their pride to put themselves on a level with their Maker, they have, since the very beginning, used every endeavour



to get themselves honoured as gods by deluded mortals, and to imitate, among their votaries, whatever Almighty God was pleased to ordain for his own glory among his servants. Hence we find, that the devils had their temples, their altars, their priests, their sacrifices, their oracles, their prophets, throughout the whole heathen world, and even, upon occasions, their miracles also; thereby imitating the works of God, and procuring to themselves the vain homage of worship and adoration on earth, which they could never have found in heaven. From this known disposition of these haughty spirits, it is no surprising thing to a Christian, that they should endeavour to have their sacraments also, and should enter into compacts with such unhappy mortals as they could delude for this purpose, engaging to perform certain uncommon effects in nature, or such as their votaries should require, whenever these last should perform, on their part, such exterior signs or actions as should be agreed upon between them for that end. A conduct of this kind would serve to gratify several different passions of the human mind, particularly pride, envy and hatred, and would therefore, when proposed to them, be readily agreed to by such unhappy souls as either knew not God, or had lost all sense and fear of the Deity, and were, by their vices, become slaves to the above, or such other violent passions; and it would no less gratify the pride of these infernal spirits, to be thus

honoured by men, in their having recourse to them for such things as they wanted to be done, instead of applying to the great God that made them. Seeing, therefore, that spiritual beings, both good and bad, have often appeared to men, and conversed with them on various occasions, as the examples above related from holy writ manifestly show, it is clear there is no impossibility that such compacts should be entered into between wicked spirits and men; it is even natural to expect them from the known dispositions both of the one and the other. Now, if such a compact be supposed to have been made, in which the devil ordains certain outward actions to be done, and engages to perform such and such extraordinary effects in nature, whenever these actions are done, as agreed upon; it is plain that the knowledge of the connection between the outward sign and the effect to be produced, may be communicated to others who had not entered into the compact themselves, and by them again be, in like manner, communicated to others whomsoever they will: It is also plain, that this knowledge may be imparted to others, merely as a curiosity, or as a secret of nature, without any insinuation that the effect so produced is the work of the devil; nay, as the exterior signs used may even be sacred things, and the words pronounced taken from the holy scriptures, ignorant persons may, by that means, be so far deluded as to look upon the use of these things

things as lawful or holy, and think they are serving God, while they are honouring the devil. Now, compacts of this kind with wicked spirits, and the using and trusting to their infernal signs for procuring the effect intended, is what is meant in general by the terms, *witchcraft*, *sorcery*, *inchantment*, *magic*, *charms*, and the like: but as there are different degrees of guilt in the things done, so, strictly speaking, the idea assigned to these terms is different accordingly; for *witchcraft* and *sorcery* seem properly to signify the very being in such compact with wicked spirits, and having a personal familiar intercourse with them: and those who have this are called *witches* and *sorcerers*. *Inchantment* and the *art magic* seem rather to imply the knowledge and use of these signs and their effects, knowing them to be from an evil principle, though the persons who use them did not make the compact themselves, nor had any personal intercourse with the devil, but had learned it from others. Even the scripture speaks of magic as an art: *As for the delusions of art magic, they were put down, and their vaunting of wisdom was reproved with disgrace*, speaking of the magicians of Egypt. Wisd. vii. 17. Now an art implies a thing taught by one man to another, and it would appear from other parts of scripture, that this *art magic* was professedly taught among the Egyptians and Chaldeans. See Daniel, in several places. *Charms*, *spells*, and *superstitious practices*, imply



the use of these signs, with a confidence in them as curiosities or natural secrets, without knowing, or, at least, without fully adverting to the source from which they arise. Besides these general names, there are also many particular appellations given to the different species of these practices, and to those who use them, according to the several effects produced, and the various means used for procuring them, such as diviners, augurs, soothsayers, pythoneses, necromancers, fortune-tellers, and the like.

VII. Deists and Freethinkers turn all these things into ridicule, looking upon them as impossibilities, chimæras, and the fruits of great weakness of mind, and childish credulity : No wonder ! for as they are not willing to allow the devil an existence at all, they cannot well allow he has any commerce or communication with men. It is to be observed, however, that infidelity itself has never yet been able to bring the least shadow of a proof why spiritual beings may not exist ; or, if they exist, why they may not act in the affairs of this material creation ; and all they say on this subject, when stripped of its dress and colouring, is reduced to a sneer and a witticism. In Christianity, the possibility of these diabolical operations can admit of no doubt : that they have often been done, and a communication kept up by their means between wicked spirits and men, is a truth most manifestly revealed

revealed in the holy scriptures ; and if such intercourse be possible, and has actually existed in the world, who will be so bold as pretend to say, it can never exist again ? It would, indeed, be a very blameable credulity to believe every idle story related of this kind ; but it would be a no less blameable folly to deny the possibility of their existence, when we consider what the word of God teaches of this matter, which we find contained under the following heads : 1. All commerce of this kind, and all connection with those who practise such things, is severely prohibited by Almighty God, as a crime most detestable in his eyes. Thus *Exod. xxii. 18. Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live : Levit. xix. 31. Regard not them that have familiar spirits, neither seek after wizards, to be defiled by them. Levit. xx. 6. And the soul that turneth after such as have familiar spirits, and after wizards, to go a-whoring after them, I will even set my face against that soul, and cut him off from among his people. Ib. verse 27. A man also or a woman that hath a familiar spirit, or that is a wizard, shall surely be put to death ; they shall stone them with stones ; their blood shall be upon them. And Deut. xviii. 10. There shall not be found among you any one—that uses divination, or an observer of times, or an incanter, or a witch, or a charmer, or a consulter with familiar spirits, or a wizard, or a necromancer, for all that do these things are an abomination to the Lord. And, in the new law, witchcraft is reckoned by St Paul among those works*

works of the flesh, of which those who are guilty, he assures us, *shall not inherit the kingdom of God.* Gal. v. And Rev. xxi. 8. it is declared, that *murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone.* Now, can any thing be more impious than to suppose, that God Almighty would have made such severe prohibitions of a crime, which not only had no existence in nature, but could not possibly have an existence? Can there be a more blasphemous arraignment of the Divine Wisdom than to suppose it capable of such folly? Besides that, it is plain from all the above texts, that they speak of the thing as real and certain, and as actually practised in the world. 2. Those who, contrary to this prohibition, were guilty of this crime, are severely condemned by the word of God, and their punishments proposed as monuments of the divine justice against it. Thus, 2 Kings xvii. 17. it is expressly declared, that this was one of the principal causes of the ruin and dispersion of the ten tribes: *They caused their sons and daughters to pass through the fire; they used divinations and enchantments—therefore the Lord was very angry with Israel, and removed them out of his sight.* This also is represented as one of the greatest crimes of Manasses, which provoked the wrath of God so highly against him; for *he observed times, and used enchantments, and dealt with familiar spirits and wizards; he wrought much wickedness*



*wickedness in the sight of the Lord, to provoke him to anger.* 2 Kings, xxi. 6. Here we find the commerce with familiar spirits, and the existence of wizards and witches, expressly affirmed, and this commerce declared to be the crime of which this wicked prince was actually guilty, and for which he incurred the just displeasure of Almighty God. Now, can any one who believes the scriptures deny the reality, much less the possibility of these things? 3. Those good princes who, in obedience to the divine command, put away those who dealt in these impieties, and discouraged all such wicked practices, are highly praised in the holy scriptures for so doing. Thus it is recorded in praise of Saul, who at the beginning was an excellent prince, that *he had put away those that had familiar spirits, and the wizards, out of the land.* 1 Sam. xxviii. 3. And among the many good things that Josiah did, it is particularly observed of him, that *the workers with familiar spirits and the wizards—and all the abominations that were spied in the land of Judah, did Josiah put away, that he might perform the words of the law.* 2 Kings, xxiii. 24. Now, how could they be put away if they had no existence? And how can their existence be called in question without denying the scripture? 4. We find several examples in scripture of particular persons who dealt in those practices to a very great degree, and which shows to what a length the power of Satan is sometimes permitted to go, in doing things

things extraordinary by means of those his agents. Thus the magicians of Egypt are expressly affirmed to have performed prodigies similar to the miracles of Moses, by their enchantments; the witch of En-dor also is particularly taken notice of as a person who had such intercourse with wicked spirits; and in the New Testament, every one knows of Simon the magician, of whom we are told, Acts viii. that, for some time before Philip went to Samaria to preach the gospel there, he had *in the same city used sorcery, and bewitched the people of Samaria, giving out that himself was some great one*; and so many and great were the wonders he did among them, whether real or only apparent, that to him they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, *this man is the great power of God*; and to him they had regard, because that for a long time he had bewitched them with his sorceries. Here we not only see an example of one guilty of this diabolical commerce to a very great degree, but we also find, that such people are sometimes permitted to hurt others, to bewitch and delude them by their sorceries. We also read of Elymas, another magician, who opposed the preaching of the gospel by St Paul, whom that great apostle struck blind for his impiety, and called him, *full of all subtilty, and all mischief, and child of the devil, and enemy of all righteousness, who did not cease to pervert the right ways of the Lord*. Acts xiii. 10. In which words the apostle gives us the true

true character of all such people, and the light in which they stand in the eyes of the great God that made them. We must not omit here the young woman *possessed with a spirit of divination, which brought her masters much gain by soothsaying*, who was dispossessed by St Paul, as we read Acts xvi. 16. Let now any serious Christian attentively consider these repeated testimonies of the word of God on the agency of evil spirits in this material creation, and say if he thinks it possible to express the actual existence of these diabolical operations, and of the interposition of wicked spirits with the affairs of men, in clearer and stronger terms than is here done; and consequently, if it would not be the height of impiety to deny a truth so strongly, so repeatedly, and so clearly affirmed in these sacred oracles. It is, therefore, undeniable, according to the Christian revelation, that wicked spirits often have had a communication with men, that they have great power and strength, natural to them as spirits, for performing many extraordinary things in this material creation, and that they have often exerted this power at the desire, and by the means of those who had an intercourse and communication with them.

VIII. Here perhaps a question may be proposed, *Are there any people at present in the world who are guilty of these practices?* In answer to which, it must be observed, that it neither makes  
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for nor against my subject, whether there be, or be not; it is enough for me to have shown, that the agency of these infernal beings, as well as of good angels, in this lower world, is a truth revealed by God in the holy scriptures: However, as the above question is curious, and it may be agreeable to my readers to have a just and proper solution of it, what seems to be the real case is as follows:

1. That there have been such people in the world who have had compacts, and familiar personal commerce, with wicked spirits, is undoubted; the word of God affirms it, gives several examples of those who have practised these crimes, and makes severe laws against them. 2. That there may be such people still in the world cannot be denied; what has been may be; and the prohibition of these crimes, which we find in the New Testament, where they are condemned as grievous sins, evidently supposes that they may be found even among Christians. 3. That these people are as frequent among Christians, as the vulgar, illiterate people commonly imagine, is surely false; for it is certain the devil's power is much abridged and restrained wherever the gospel is planted; and among the many glorious promises made by Almighty God to the church, and foretold by the prophets, this is one, *I will take away forceries out of the land, and there shall be no divinations in thee.* Micah v. 11. which words at least imply, that these things will be less frequent under the gospel; that the devil

devil will not be allowed to delude the people to such a degree as in former times; and that men will not be so much given to these abominations.

4. That there are, or may be, many who attempt to have a commerce with wicked spirits, is very possible; because it is very natural to suppose, that the passions of men will push them on to such extremes; and because those who are conversant in the care of souls know it from experience, as this case sometimes does actually come before them.

5. As for those who have no personal intercourse with spiritual beings, but who use charms and superstitious practices in order to procure some end proposed, whether they know and reflect that these are diabolical inventions, or have no idea of them as such, it is incredible what numbers of them are to be found, especially among the lower class of people, in all countries.

XI. From what has been said then, it is evident, that nothing is more certain, according to the Christian revelation, than the existence of spiritual beings, both good and bad, and their agency in nature; that they are endowed with very great power and many qualities superior to man, and of course can do many things in the material creation, which will be truly miraculous with relation to us, and above the abilities of all natural agents. We shall now briefly inquire in what manner they perform these miraculous operations;

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at least, what light our reason, and the knowledge we have of their nature and qualities from revelation, can afford us concerning this matter. And, first, as the scripture every where represents these beings to us as exceeding strong (*mighty in strength*, as the Psalmist expresses it), on this account they must be able to perform many things in the motion of bodies and altering their parts, in suspending the usual effects of the laws of nature, and the like, far superior to any thing that can be performed by any natural agent. Again, the agility of angelical beings is doubtless exceeding great, so that they can transport themselves from one place to another with the most amazing velocity, far superior to any thing we can conceive in bodies. We may form some idea of this by considering, that the light of the sun, though a bodily substance, has such an immense velocity, as to arrive at the earth in less than ten minutes time. If, therefore, spirits can move themselves with much greater velocity than bodies, with what inconceivable quickness must these beings be able to transport themselves from one part of the world to another? On this account, they will also be able to do many things truly miraculous, both by communicating intelligence of what is doing at a distance to men, almost instantaneously, and also by transporting bodies to distant places with the greatest velocity; of this last we have a remarkable example in Daniel, where we are told,



told, that when that holy prophet was for the second time put into the den of lions, and had got no meat for some considerable space of time, the prophet Habbakkuk in Judea, some hundreds of miles distant from him, going out in the morning to the field with a mess of pottage to the reapers, an angel of God caught him by the hair of the head, and in an instant carried him to Daniel in the den with the pottage; and, when Daniel had eaten the pottage, brought him back again in the same manner to provide more for his reapers. Dan. xiv. It is true, this chapter of Daniel is not found in the Hebrew, and on that account is thrown into the Apocrypha by the Protestants; but it has, from the earliest ages, been received by the Catholic church as divine scripture, and its authority as an antient history is not called in question. Tertullian, speaking of the velocity with which spirits transport themselves from one place to another, expresses himself thus: "*Every spirit is winged; both angels and* ' *dæmons are so; on that account they are every* ' *where in a moment; the whole world is one* ' *place to them; they know where any thing is* ' *doing as easily as they can declare it \*.*"

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\* Omnis spiritus ales; hoc et angeli et dæmones. Igitur momento ubique sunt. Totus-orbis locus illis unus est. Quid ubi geratur, tam facile sciunt quam enuntiant. Tert. Apol.

X. The great knowledge of spiritual beings is another prerogative they have, which enables them to do many things above the abilities of natural agents, and that in different respects: 1. Experimental philosophy has, for some time past, been making daily improvements, and discovering more and more of the wonderful powers of nature, as appears particularly in the discoveries made in magnetism and electricity; and it cannot be doubted, but there are many more secrets in nature, of which mankind are still totally ignorant. Spiritual beings have doubtless a much greater knowledge of these things than men, and consequently are capable of producing many extraordinary effects in the material creation, which, from our ignorance of these powers of nature, would appear to us most astonishing. But, as all they can do of this kind is only by putting these powers of nature in action, and as these must have time to perform their effects, such extraordinary things cannot be instantaneous, even with all the strength of spiritual beings. Hence, miraculous operations, which are merely the effect of strength or agility, or which are done by the application of natural means, and require time to produce them, are known by these circumstances to be within the reach of the natural abilities of spirits, and therefore cannot of themselves alone give proof of a divine interposition. 2. From this more intimate knowledge that spiritual beings have of all the powers.

powers and properties of material agents, which are hitherto intirely hid from us, they will, no doubt, be able to foresee many natural effects which will necessarily result from these powers when applied to action, and from their necessary or occasional combinations; and this they may know for a considerable time before these effects actually happen, especially when they themselves are going to set these powers in action. If now they should communicate this their foreknowledge of these necessary events to any man, and he should foretell them to the world, this prediction, and its subsequent verification, will appear miraculous to those who know nothing of the natural causes producing the effect foretold; just as the prediction of an eclipse by an astronomer, and its verification when the eclipse happens, will be miraculous to those who never saw nor heard of the like. 3. As spiritual beings have also a much more thorough knowledge of the human frame than we have, they may in like manner, with great probability, conjecture what any particular person or persons, with whose temper and disposition they are well acquainted, will do upon such and such occasions as they see them exposed to; and hence may be able, with a pretty considerable degree of certainty, to foretell even future contingent events of this kind, which are near at hand, and their prediction may afterwards be verified by the events; we see even human sagacity,



from a thorough knowledge of the subject, will often arrive at a considerable degree of fore-knowledge of this kind. And it is in these two kinds of fore-knowledge, that soothsayers, false prophets, and those who had familiar spirits, mentioned in the scriptures, might sometimes foretell things which did actually come to pass; and in the same manner is also explained any of the predictions of the heathen oracles, which were afterwards verified by the event. St Augustin, speaking on the divination of evil spirits, explains it in the same manner as I have done: *First, says he, we must know, that, for the most part, they foretell only such things as they themselves are going to do; for they often receive power to cause diseases, and by vitiating the air to render it morbid; sometimes also they foretell not those things which they do themselves, but which, from natural signs, they foresee are to happen; which signs cannot fall under the knowledge of man.\**

XI. Another way by which spiritual beings may appear to do things miraculous in our eyes, is by what is called fascination or bewitching, which may

\* Primum sciendum est, quoniam de divinatione demonum questio est, illos ea plerumque preannuntiare quæ ipsi facturi sunt: Accipiunt enim sæpe potestatem et morbos immittere, et ipsum aerem vitando morbidum reddere; aliquando autem non quæ ipsi faciunt, sed quæ, naturalibus signis, futura prænotant; quæ signa in hominum sensus venire non possunt. Aug. de Divin. Dæmon. C. V.

may be conceived possible two different ways, either by making such impressions upon the organs of our senses, as if the real material object that naturally could make them was present and acting upon them, or by taking upon themselves the outward appearances of the things they want to represent. That spiritual beings, both good and bad, have a very great power in acting upon our internal senses, by altering and moving the humours of our bodies, so as by this means to raise many ideas in our imagination, and affections in our appetite, will not be called in question by any who profess the Christian religion. With regard to wicked spirits, all those texts of scripture which we have seen above concerning internal temptations, manifestly show this; and, indeed, how else could we account for those violent temptations of blasphemy, despair, scruples, involuntary doubts against faith, and the like, which are often born in upon the mind with the utmost fury, to the unspeakable torment of the sufferer, and in spite of all his most earnest endeavours and efforts to expell them; how, I say, could this be accounted for, but from the action of those wicked spirits violently disturbing the imagination? And, with regard to good angels, the Christian religion assures us, that they inspire us with good thoughts, calm our fears, assuage our passions, and that they also represent things to our imagination in our sleep, so as to discover to the servants of God, by that means, what things the divine

vine pleasure requires from them : Thus the angel of God appeared to Joseph in a dream, and told him to fly into Egypt from the fury of Herod ; and Almighty God himself, speaking to his people on this subject, says : *Behold I send an angel before thee—beware of him and obey his voice, provoke him not, for he will not pardon your transgressions—if thou shalt indeed obey his voice ; and do all that I speak, then I will be an enemy to thine enemies.*

Exod. xxiii. Now, if spiritual beings have so great power to act upon our internal senses, there cannot be any doubt that they can do the same upon our external organs also. In the holy scriptures we have numbers of examples of angels appearing to men and conversing with them ; the common way these apparitions are explained, is by saying, that these spiritual beings took to themselves an aerial body, or of some other matter, by which the same natural impressions were made upon the senses of the beholders as by the natural body of a man. But this opinion is subject to several difficulties ; for, 1. there is not the least necessity for supposing this : If these spiritual beings can make such strong impressions as they sometimes do upon our internal senses, to do which they certainly stand in no need of the help of aerial bodies, how can it be imagined they should stand in need of such help to make what impressions they please upon our external senses also ? If an angel could deprive the fire of all its power to hurt the three  
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holy children: that were thrown into the furnace, without taking any material body to assist him, could he not with equal ease communicate any motion he pleased to the air, so as to excite the sound of words in the ears of those present, or reflect the rays of light to their eyes, so as to excite in their minds the idea of any colour or figure he might think proper? If the angels can act upon bodies at all, why not upon the air and light as well as any other body, without the necessity of taking any kind of material body to assist them? Nay, if an angel could make to himself a body of air, or any other matter, in order thereby to move the air or light, so as to affect the senses of those present, why could he not as well directly move the air or light itself, without the intervention of any material instrument whatsoever? 21. Several of the examples of these apparitions related in scripture are of such a nature, as plainly shows that the impressions were made by the spiritual agent upon the senses of those present immediately, without the intervention of any material body at all. Had such a material body been taken by the angels who appeared to men, this must have reflected the light, and moved the air equally on all sides as other bodies do, and consequently all present must have been equally sensible of the angel's presence, and equally heard his words; but we find that frequently this was not the case: the angel that appeared to Balaam was seen by the ass  
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for some time before he appeared to the master; the angel that appeared to Daniel by the great river was seen by him alone; and, says Daniel, *I alone saw the vision, for the men that were with me saw not the vision, but a great quaking fell upon them.* Dan. x. 7. And at the conversion of St Paul, though our Saviour spoke to him in an audible manner and conversed with him, yet he himself tells us, that *they that were with him saw indeed the light and were afraid, but they heard not the voice of him that spoke to him.* Acts xxii. 9. In which examples it is evident, that these apparitions were exhibited by an impression made upon the organs of some particular persons, and not of others, though equally present, which could not have been the case, without another miracle, had they been performed by means of any aerial body taken by the agents for this purpose; and therefore, it is most reasonable to conclude they were immediate impressions made by those who appeared upon the organs of those who saw them. This is further confirmed, 3. from the way the scriptures speak, when mentioning the appearance of any spiritual being to those who, though present, saw him not before; for the expression used on these occasions plainly implies an impression made immediately on the organs of those to whom the apparition is exhibited; thus, though the angel had appeared for some time to Balaam's ass, yet he had never been seen by himself; at last, *the Lord opened the eyes of*  
of

of Balaam, and he saw the angel. Num. xxii. 31. So also when Elisha's servant expressed great fear on seeing the army of the Syrians, his master, to comfort him, said, *Fear not, for they that be with us are more than they that be with them; and Elisha prayed, and said, Lord, I pray thee, open his eyes that he may see; and the Lord opened the eyes of the young man, and he saw, and behold the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha.*

2 Kings, vi. 16. 17. Shall we say here, that all these angels took material bodies in an instant to appear to the young man, and not rather that the impression was immediately made on his eyes without any material means used? This is surely the most natural meaning of the expression here used, *the Lord opened his eyes.* On these grounds, then, it seems most reasonable to conclude, that spiritual beings can of themselves make immediate impressions upon our outward senses, so as to excite the same ideas in our minds that bodily objects, if present, would do, and can make objects appear to us which really have no existence before us; they can also, as we have seen, by their action on our internal senses, excite very strong ideas in our imagination of things that have no real existence but in our fancies: When this is done by evil spirits for their wicked ends, it is called fascination; when by good angels, to communicate the will of God to his servants, it is a kind of revelation. (At the same time it is not to be doubted, that



that these spiritual agents may make use of bodily instruments on occasions in such operations, as more probably was the case with the angel that attended the people of God in the appearance of a pillar of fire and of a cloud, which was visibly seen by the people; also, from their strength and agility, they can doubtless present and take away any bodily object almost instantaneously, so as to be imperceptible to those present, and by all these different operations perform things far above the abilities of natural agents. And it is in some one or other of these ways, that several of the holy fathers and other learned men account for what the magicians of Egypt did by their enchantments.

XII. In these different ways, we find spiritual beings can act upon matter and exhibit various effects, real or apparent, to our eyes; how far they can go in doing such operations we cannot tell; but our ignorance in this can be of no prejudice to us; because we are certain, as we shall afterwards see when explaining the criterion, that God Almighty will never allow wicked spirits to use this power, so as invincibly to deceive us; and what good angels do of this kind is done only by authority from God, for our benefit and advantage.

## CHAP. III.

*On the Possibility of MIRACLES.*

I. **T**O call in question the possibility of miracles makes a very odd appearance in the eyes of a serious Christian, and, according to right reason, should appear no less absurd to any one who believes the existence of the Deity, and acknowledges the universe to be the work of his almighty power. But, however absurd this may be, we know that, *in this enlightened age*, it is actually done; nay, not only is the possibility of miracles called in question, but it is plainly denied by the incredulous in these our days; who, whilst they glory in the many discoveries made in the works of nature, and boast of the improvement of their reason, and the superior light of their understanding, do, by such denial, give proof of their ignorance, and show that their boasted light is mere darkness, and that the pretended improvement of their reason serves only to make them more *learnedly fools*. This charge might seem a little too severe, and would justly be exposed to the ridicule of the accused, should I pretend to support it only by the authority of revelation, which they deny. But this I don't intend to do, nor is there any need

here for the help of revelation ; the possibility of miracles is so natural a consequence of their definition itself, and the idea we have given of them, that one must be determined to lay aside all reason, and act in direct opposition to its clearest light, who pretends to deny it. Their case, however, is so far to be pitied, as it is necessity that drives them to this extreme ; the authority of miracles carries along with it a most insuperable argument against their tenets ; it is impossible to escape the weight of this authority, if miracles be allowed an existence, and to deny their possibility is the easiest and most expeditious method of freeing themselves at once of this embargo. But it is one thing to deny, and another to prove ; they do, indeed, offer something by way of proof for their denial, but a little attention to the merits of the cause will easily show, that nothing is more unreasonable than what they alledge on this subject.

II. We have seen above \*, that miracles, considered as to the facts themselves, are of two sorts ; *first*, such as consist in a suspension of the effects of some of the known laws of nature ; and, *secondly*, such as are not contrary to any of these laws, but are out of the ordinary course of nature, and require a power to perform them superior to any natural agent. Of the first kind are the

\* Chap. I. § vii.



the following ; if a stone should fly upwards of itself ; if the waters of a great river should be divided, those below running down and those above standing still, or gathering up in a heap, without any visible cause supporting them ; if the sun should stop in his course ; if a man should walk on the water, and the like : all which are contrary to the established known laws of nature, and imply a suspension of their usual effects. Of the second kind it would be, if a man should cure diseases in an instant by only willing it, by command, or by a simple touch ; if a person should know and foretell contingent future events ; if a man should be raised from the dead, and such like : these two kinds of facts must be considered separately, in order to show *that miracles are possible*, in the most distinct and convincing manner.

III. With regard to the first kind, such as consist in a suspension of any of the laws of nature, it is evident, that if miracles of this class be impossible, this impossibility must necessarily arise from one or other of these three causes ; either that these laws are in themselves absolutely immutable and unsuspendible, if I may be allowed the expression, so that their effects cannot be superseded by any power whatsoever ; or that there is not in being any agent whose abilities are capable of suspending them ; or that it would argue inconstancy and mutability in the divine Author of those laws,

if, having once fixed them as the rules by which the universe should be regulated, he should at any time either suspend their effects himself, or allow them to be suspended by others; but it will easily be made appear that none of these can be said, and therefore we justly conclude that miracles of this kind are not impossible. That the laws of nature are not immutable in themselves is evident from experience; many of those which we are acquainted with, not only may be, but actually often are suspended, and hindered from producing their effects, by other stronger laws acting against them; nay, effects diametrically opposite to them are often produced by this means. Hence we may justly argue, that those other laws of nature which fall not under our experience, though we know no natural or even created cause capable of suspending their effects, yet are not in themselves unsuspendible, but would undoubtedly be suspended, if any agent, with sufficient abilities, were to act against them. We see no impossibility in this conclusion, no reason why some laws should be immutable in producing their effects, and others not; and if analogy be allowed to have any weight, we must acknowledge that this conclusion is just and reasonable; therefore the laws of nature are not in themselves incapable of being suspended, and consequently miracles are not impossible upon this score.

IV. We find from experience that man, by his own natural strength and abilities, and much more if he takes in the help of art, and makes use of the powers which he finds in other creatures, can produce many effects quite contrary to some of the known laws of nature, can suspend these laws in many cases, and hinder the effects which they would naturally produce. From this we rationally argue, that beings of a superior nature, who are endued with much greater strength than man, and possess abilities far superior to his, and who, at the same time, are much better acquainted with all the powers of other creatures than man is, must of course be able to suspend many more of the laws of nature, to stop their ordinary effects, and produce others quite contrary to them, which man could never do, nor knows any natural cause capable of performing. Let us suppose, for example, the strength of a man to be as *one*, with which he could raise a weight of *ten stone*. If we suppose an angel to have a degree of strength as *ten thousand*, he will of course be able to raise a weight of *one hundred thousand stone*. Let us now suppose again that this angel, invisible to us, should, by compact with any man, immediately at his desire raise up into the air a body weighing a hundred thousand stone; this would be an evident miracle to all that beheld it: Now, can the possibility of such a miracle be denied, either from the thing done, or the agent that is supposed to do it?



not from the thing done, which is not impossible in itself, if there be any agent endued with strength sufficient for performing it. Shall we then deny that an angel endued with such strength can exist? But where is the impossibility of this? Upon what grounds shall we deny it? And even if this should not be allowed, it will not surely be denied, that God himself has strength sufficient for producing the effect supposed; and if it should be done by God instead of an angel, the possibility of it cannot be called in question for want of an agent capable of performing it, tho' the thing done be evidently in direct opposition to all the laws of gravity. Wherefore, as the same reasoning will equally hold in every possible case, we may justly conclude in general, that whatever laws of nature there may be superior to the powers of beings of an inferior order, there are supernatural agents of a higher order capable of suspending them; and if there be any of those laws superior to the powers of all created agents, they can never be above the almighty power of God; consequently there can never be wanting an agent, either among creatures or in the Creator himself, capable of suspending any of the laws of nature whatsoever, since these laws are in themselves suspendible; and therefore miracles of this class are not impossible for want of proper agents capable of suspending them.

V. The last refuge that infidelity can have is to say, that it would argue inconstancy and mutability in God, the divine Author of all the laws of nature, either to suspend their effects in any particular instance himself, or to allow any other so to suspend them. But here again I must appeal to experience; by which it is certain, that several of the laws of nature which we are acquainted with, yea, that those of gravity and attraction themselves, which surely are among the more general laws of nature, so far as we know, are in many cases suspended from producing their proper effects, by other created powers acting in opposition to them, yet without any prejudice to the immutability of God. If, therefore, some of the laws of nature may be suspended, and yet God remain immutable, why not others? why not all, when an adequate power is exerted against them? Does it argue mutability in God, that an angel, for example, should stop the course of waters running in a river (supposing him capable by his own natural strength to do so), contrary to the known laws of gravity; whilst yet it argues no such mutability, that man, by his natural strength, or by the help of gunpowder, should make a ball of iron fly upwards from the earth with a most amazing velocity, which is diametrically opposite to these same laws? And if neither of these cases can prejudice the immutability of God, why should it be thought to do so, if he himself should be pleased to stop for a time

time the diurnal motion of the earth, and thereby lengthen the day, and make the sun in appearance stand still in the heavens? Does it argue mutability in God, to suspend any of those laws by the sole act of his will, whilst it argues no such mutability when he does it by using other secondary causes for that purpose? If this were the case, a very absurd consequence would follow; namely, that God could perform any miraculous effect he pleases, in suspending the laws of nature by the ministry of angels, giving them strength for this purpose, but could do no such thing of himself without destroying his own immutability, and becoming changeable. Let us therefore conclude, that as we see those laws of nature that fall under our experience are often suspended by other natural causes acting against them, without any prejudice to the immutability of God, so it never can hurt that divine prerogative, when he himself, by the sole act of his will, shall be pleased to suspend any of these laws, without making use of any created secondary causes; and consequently, that such miracles as consist in a suspension of any of the laws of nature are possible, without the least prejudice to the immutability of the Deity. In a word, we may observe here, in general, that the whole order of the creation, and all those laws by which this order is kept up, are the effects of the free will and good pleasure of Almighty God. He made choice of the present system of nature, not by force, nor from necessity,

but



but according to his own good pleasure; neither did he make this choice at random, nor by caprice, but with a view to those wise moral ends which he proposed to himself by doing so; consequently, as he freely made all things in nature such as they are, he can with equal ease change them as he pleases; as he freely enacted those laws by which all nature is governed for the best of ends, so he can dispense with any of them when he sees proper; *that is*, when the end proposed can better be accomplished by such dispensation: and though this good end happens in time, yet both it, and the dispensing with any law of nature, in order to procure it, were always present with God from all eternity; and therefore, when it is actually accomplished in time, can argue no change in him at all. He forms no new decrees, he makes no new laws, he acquires no new knowledge which he had not before; what he wills in time he willed from all eternity; and, as St Augustin justly observes, *opera mutat, concilia non mutat*; "he changes his works, but his counsels and views remain always the same." This the holy scripture beautifully expresses in the books of Wisdom: *Nothing is hidden from his eyes; he sees from eternity to eternity, and nothing is wonderful to him.* Eccles. 39. Consequently nothing new, nothing that can cause or suppose any change in him.

Seeing

Seeing, therefore, that the laws of nature are not incapable in themselves of being suspended, provided an adequate force acts against them; that there is to be found, either in created agents or in God, power and strength fully capable of suspending all these laws, and that they may be suspended by any of these causes without the smallest prejudice to the divine immutability; it therefore evidently follows, that miracles of this kind are not impossible.

VI. We come now to consider the possibility of those miracles which do not consist in the suspension of any law of nature, but are *beside the ordinary course of nature*. And here I should scarce imagine the possibility of this kind could admit the least difficulty with any thinking person: For, will any one be so bold as to deny, that the same almighty power, which at first created all things out of nothing, and gave to every creature its being, powers, and properties, is still able to perform numberless effects which far exceed all the powers and forces bestowed on these his creatures? Will any one dare to deny that Almighty God is able to do in a moment, by the sole act of his own will, what he does in a certain space of time by the ordinary powers of created agents? It is not contrary to any law of nature that diseases in the human body should be cured, that plants should grow from their seed, and the like; these effects are daily

ly produced by natural causes, but they require time to perform them. Almighty God gave these natural causes the powers of producing these effects; and will any one deny that he himself can produce them in an instant by the sole act of his will, without making use of these created powers? Or will it be said, that Almighty God, in giving such powers to creatures, has divested himself of the power of acting without their help? Or has he bound himself by any immutable law never to produce the above effects without them? The bare proposing these things is enough to show the absurdity of them; and it is evident, at first sight, that all such miraculous effects as are plainly above the power of all created agents, are yet possible, nay easy, to Almighty God, whenever he pleases to perform them. Now, miracles of this second class are the most excellent of all others, and the most proper for obtaining all the ends intended to be gained by miracles, as they are the most incontestible proofs of the finger of God; and what is to be observed particularly of them is, that the argument of Freethinkers, drawn from the immutability of God, against the possibility of miracles, should he change or suspend any of the laws of nature; though of no manner of weight, even against miracles of the first class which imply such suspension; yet has no place here at all, where these laws are neither changed nor suspended, but a new effect produced by the almighty hand of God, out of the ordinary



ordinary course of these laws, and superior to the strength of all creatures.

VII. I find another argument made use of against the possibility of miracles, drawn from the wisdom of God, as if it would argue a defect of wisdom in the Deity, if the laws established by him for the regulation of the universe were insufficient for this purpose, and should require at any time to be suspended, in order to obtain the ends he had in view. What I have said above concerning the immutability of God is equally applicable to his wisdom, and equally shows the weakness of this argument drawn from it against the possibility of miracles: Besides which we may further add, that, as Mr Farmer justly observes, “ whoever reflects on the bounds extent and duration of the divine government, will easily perceive, that nothing can be more absurd, as well as arrogant, than for man, a creature whose faculties are so limited, and who is but of yesterday, to presume to determine, that no fit occasion for extraordinary interposals can ever occur in that administration, the plan of which transcends his comprehension. By what principles of reason can it be demonstrated, that he who reigns from eternity to eternity never formed any designs, except such as may be accomplished by the present establishment and structure of the universe?” Now, if Almighty God has from all eternity formed different designs to be executed

executed among his creatures at different periods, the exhibition of miracles at these periods, in order to the more perfect execution of these designs, so far from being an arraignment of his wisdom, gives us in fact the most manifest and the most endearing display of it. Besides, had the universe been composed only of necessary agents, without any liberty or free will in their actions, extraordinary interpositions of the Deity by miracles would have been less required, if at all; but as the rational creatures, whom Almighty God governs by moral laws, are endowed with free will and liberty to obey or not obey his commands, and as experience too surely shows how apt they are to neglect their duty and transgress his orders, nay even to forget what they owe him, notwithstanding the numberless proofs of his providence and perfections displayed in the regular course of the universe, which, by use and custom, lose their power to move our hearts; nothing can more display the infinite wisdom and goodness of the Creator, than that he should at certain times give extraordinary proofs of his power, by controuling the usual course of nature, thereby to awaken intelligent beings from their lethargy, to rouse up in their hearts a sense of their duty and dependence, and to give them a deep impression of the power and presence of their sovereign Master. “ It would  
 ‘ be difficult to prove (says Mr Farmer) that God  
 ‘ may not, in certain circumstances, have greater

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“ reasons

‘ reasons for varying from his stated rules of act-  
‘ ing than for adhering to them: and whenever this  
‘ is the case, and the end proposed is proportion-  
‘ able to the means for accomplishing it, the mi-  
‘ racles are *worthy* of a divine interposition.—Nor  
‘ does this imply any inconsistency in the divine  
‘ conduct, or any defect or disturbance of the laws  
‘ of nature. When the Deity occasionally con-  
‘ trouls or supercedes them, he does not hereby  
‘ contradict or defeat his intention in their first  
‘ establishment; he proposes a design different  
‘ from it, but not inconsistent with it. The laws  
‘ of nature being the laws of God are certainly  
‘ perfect; *that is*, perfectly adapted to answer all  
‘ the uses for which they are designed; but mi-  
‘ racles derogate not from this perfection; because  
‘ they aim at an end which the laws of nature  
‘ were not intended to answer.” To this just  
remark we must add, that both the ends proposed,  
and the miracles wrought to obtain them, were  
from all eternity known and present to the wisdom  
of God, and comprehended before his eyes in the  
general plan of his operations, to be put in execu-  
tion at the time appointed by him; which again  
shows that miracles, instead of derogating from this  
wisdom, still further display its immensity, which  
comprehends all things, foresees all things, and so  
wonderfully adapts the means to the ends and de-  
signs it proposes. I shall conclude this subject by  
inserting another passage from Mr Farmer, wherein  
he



he very judiciously sets forth the possibility of miracles with regard to the power of God. " Infinite power, though it does not extend to contradictions, performs with ease whatever is possible in its nature. And so far are miraculous works from being impossible, that they are similar to what we see actually effected in the common course of divine providence. I will endeavour to illustrate this by the following example ; To cause water to be both water and wine at the same time, is a manifest absurdity and contradiction, and therefore cannot be the object of any power ; but to turn water into wine, or to change one liquid into another specifically different, is certainly within the reach of divine omnipotence, inasmuch as there is nothing contradictory in the idea of such transformation, and we observe continual changes of a like kind in many parts of the creation. Thus the moisture of the earth, by a common, but admirable operation in the natural world, is converted into the juice of the grape, and numberless other juices differing in kind from each other, according to the different nature of the plant or tree which imbibes it. This observation might be extended farther, and applied to other instances. Revelation itself is a miracle ; but wherefore should it be thought impossible with God ? To his inspiration we owe our understandings, with all their powers ; from him we derive the noble faculty

‘ of speech, by which we communicate our ideas  
‘ to each other—and has the Father of our spirits  
‘ no access to them, no ability of imparting imme-  
‘ diately and directly the knowledge of his will,  
‘ and of affording sufficient evidence of his own  
‘ extraordinary presence and operation? Is there  
‘ any thing in this more inexplicable than in the  
‘ common action of mind on body, and body on  
‘ mind? Will any assert, that the Almighty Au-  
‘ thor of our frame is unable to repair the disor-  
‘ ders of it? that he who with such exquisite skill  
‘ formed the seeing eye and hearing ear, cannot  
‘ restore sight to the blind, and hearing to the  
‘ deaf? or that it is impossible for *him* to raise the  
‘ dead, who every year renews the face of na-  
‘ ture, and revives the seed sown in the earth,  
‘ and every day awakens mankind from the death  
‘ of sleep to new life, in a manner as incompre-  
‘ hensible by us as the greatest miracle? He gave  
‘ being to every living thing; to innumerable  
‘ kinds of animals, and to a great diversity of ra-  
‘ tional creatures; continually does he call into  
‘ existence ten thousand new individuals; and  
‘ is the second gift of life more difficult than  
‘ the first? The analogy between miracles and  
‘ the common operations of God in the settled  
‘ course of nature, is a convincing demonstration  
‘ of the possibility of the former.” This passage  
is a specimen of the excellent abilities of Mr Far-  
mer

mer in solid reasoning, where he employs them in a good cause, and makes it a pity that, in his Dissertation upon Miracles, he has employed his parts in advancing several things, and putting such explications on the sacred scriptures as will not stand the test of sound theology.

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CHAP. IV.



## CHAP. IV.

*On the Ends for which MIRACLES may be wrought,  
as discovered by Reason.*

I. **T**HOUGH it would be a vain attempt to pretend to investigate all the various ends and particular designs which the divine wisdom has ever had, or may have, in performing miracles; for, *Who has known the sense of the Lord, or who has been his counsellor?* Rom. xi. 14. yet it is of the utmost consequence to examine what can be known for certain on this head; not only because the enemies of Christianity make a handle for rejecting the belief of miracles, because, forsooth, they either can see no good end to be attained by them, or not such an one as they, in their wisdom, judge worthy of God for which to interpose by miracles, which pretence shall be examined in its proper place; but also because I find some good people who glory in the character of being faithful Christians, and are otherwise men of good sense and learning, yet seem to think this argument sufficient to disprove the continuation and existence of miracles in these later ages of the church, and alledge, that as the gospel is now sufficiently confirmed and widely propagated, there  
seems

seems no necessity that God should any more interpose by miracles, and therefore conclude that in fact he does not. This way of arguing stands upon this foundation, that the propagation and confirmation of the gospel is the only end worthy of God for which to interpose by miracles; but though this were true, the conclusion drawn from it would not follow, seeing the planting the gospel among those heathen nations, who have not yet received it, even according to this principle, must require the assistance of miracles, as well as the first planting it in those other nations who have long since embraced it: The difficulties to be overcome in this great work are no less among the present heathen nations than they were at the beginning of Christianity, and the bulk of the people now are as incapable of understanding the rational arguments and proofs by which the Christian religion is confirmed, as our predecessors were at their first conversion; nor can it well be thought that the heathen world at present would either give the time or application necessary for examining these proofs, even though they all had sufficient capacity for doing it. But miracles are a language fitted for the meanest capacity; they require no time nor application of study to comprehend them; they conquer at once, they convince at sight, and are the most certain as well as the most expeditious means of gaining the ends intended by them, and of conquering all the obstinacy

nacy of the heart of man; and therefore, even though it were true that the propagation of the gospel was the only end worthy of God for which to interpose by miracles, yet we might still reasonably expect from a God of infinite goodness, that he would continue from time to time to perform them, at least for the propagation of his gospel among those heathen nations who as yet do not know him. But if we examine this matter attentively, we shall clearly see, that the propagation of the gospel, though doubtless a very principal end of miracles, yet is by no means the only one; and that there are other ends besides this, which not only the light of reason shows to be worthy of God's interposing by miracle, in order to obtain them, but which have been actually judged worthy of such interposition by God himself. What these are, at least as to the general heads which seem to comprehend most of the particular cases, I shall endeavour now to show, first, by the light of reason founded on such principles as, I dare say, every man of common sense will readily admit of, and then by the light which the holy scriptures give us concerning it. To begin then with reason, the principles I lay down are these:

II. *First*, It is evident from the very nature and idea of miracles, as above explained, that no operation whatsoever, no possible effect produced or producible in the creation, can be miraculous with



with relation to God, or wonderful in his sight ; both because he thoroughly knows all that possibly can be known concerning every possible effect or operation in his creatures, and also because he possesses in himself a power not only adequate, but infinitely superior to every possible effect whatever producible in them ; so that nothing is either hard or difficult for him to perform. With the same ease by which he keeps up the present order in the universe, he can in a moment alter, or even destroy it ; with the same ease with which he created all things at the beginning out of nothing, he can, if he pleases, reduce them to nothing again ; and consequently, with respect to the almighty power of God, the most miraculous operation that can be done in the creation is as easy as the smallest, and infinitely more so to him than the throwing a stone upwards, contrary to the laws of gravity, is to man : for it is enough that he wills any thing to be done, and be what it will, great or small, his all-powerfull will is instantly obeyed.

*Secondly*, No change, alteration, or unusual effect produced in the material insensible part of the universe, merely as such, *that is*, when considered only in itself, without relation to any effect it may have upon sensitive or intelligent creatures, can, properly speaking, be called either good or evil. The idea we have of evil seems always to include

include a relation to sensitive or intelligent beings, and consists either in making them unhappy by sufferings, or in bringing upon them moral guilt and turpitude, which is disgraceful to their natures, and renders them odious in the eyes of their Creator. The evil of guilt and the evil of suffering are therefore the only thing we mean by the word *evil*, in the strict and proper acceptation of that word: Now these, as is plain, can have place only in sensitive and intelligent creatures, and not at all in the insensible and material part of the creation; the former only being capable of suffering or guilt, but not the latter: Whatever change, alteration or effect can be produced in material beings, may alter their forms, motions, configuration of their parts, or the like, but nothing of this enters into the idea of what we properly mean by evil, which therefore can only have place in the sensitive and intelligent creation.

*Thirdly*, As the very essence, I may say, of evil consists in making intelligent and sensitive creatures guilty or miserable; so *good*, being the contrary of *evil*, is, properly speaking, whatever makes these creatures innocent, and virtuous, or happy; and the more any thing contributes to make them truly virtuous or truly happy, the greater and more excellent a good it is. Mr Hutchison, in his excellent treatise of moral philosophy, speaking upon this subject, very justly observes,

serves, That our moral sense or conscience is implanted in us by the Author of our being as the proper Judge of what is good and evil, and that the several objects which this Judge approves as good, are only such as have these two qualities, *A tendency to the happiness of others, and, A tendency to the moral perfection of the mind possessing them*; and that the objects which this Judge condemns as evil, are such as have the contrary tendencies. From all which we again justly infer, that no change or effect produced in the inanimate creation, which is incapable of moral perfection or of happiness, can, properly speaking, be called either good or evil, and that these two can have place only in the sensitive or intelligent creatures.

*Fourthly,* The idea we have of God, as a being infinitely perfect, convinces us that he must essentially desire and approve the moral excellency and virtuous perfection of his creatures; and that the procuring this is an object worthy of his divine goodness and sanctity; and, on the contrary, that he must abhor and detest moral turpitude in his creatures, and that it is highly becoming his divine goodness and sanctity to prohibit and hinder the same. In fact, what is this moral sense or conscience implanted in us by the Creator, but the promulgation of his law in our hearts, the manifestation of his will, declaring in the most feeling manner what he requires from us, the most intimate



mate and convincing proof that he wills our moral excellency and perfection, and severely prohibits our moral turpitude? The whole exterior manifestation of his will to man by revelation, both in the old and new law, proves this truth, as the constant tendency of revelation is to exhort, persuade, encourage, and assist us to advance and improve our souls in virtue and perfection, and to prohibit and deter us from the contrary.

*Fifthly,* The idea we have of God as a being of infinite goodness, convinces us that he can never directly will the misery of his creatures for itself; he cannot possibly have pleasure in our sufferings merely as such; he must essentially desire and will the happiness of his creatures as an object most becoming the supreme mind, and most worthy his infinite goodness: and if, at any time, he inflicts sufferings upon his creatures, and renders them for a while unhappy, we cannot conceive that he rests in this as an ultimate object of his complacency, but must be moved to do so, in order to obtain some other end more congenial to his infinite perfections; and the light of reason points out two such ends, *viz.* either in goodness procuring the moral perfection of his creatures, which is their greatest good, or punishing them in justice for their having voluntarily, and therefore culpably, brought upon themselves the guilt of moral turpitude. Revelation confirms  
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this also in the strongest manner; for, through the whole series of the sacred scriptures, we find Almighty God every where represented to us as having the most tender love and concern for his creatures, as earnestly desiring their happiness, and as doing every thing upon his part, without infringing the freedom of their wills, to procure it. It is true, these same sacred writings do sometimes also represent him in the most awful colours, as inflicting or threatening the most dreadful miseries upon his creatures; but then we are at the same time assured that he does so against his inclinations, as forced to it by their crimes, and that even in doing it his chief design is for their greater good, namely, to reclaim them from their evil ways, and to secure their eternal happiness. Hence, then, to procure the good of his creatures, both by rendering them happy, and by promoting their moral excellency and perfection, is an object worthy of God, which the very idea we have of him, as well as his own express declaration in holy writ, convinces us that he really desires, and most powerfully endeavours to promote. But,

*Sixthly*, The case is very different with regard to the material insensible creation: We have seen above, that the present order established in the universe, and the laws of nature by which that order is kept up, are not essentially necessary in themselves, but depend entirely on the free choice

of Almighty God. It is true, Almighty God did not make this choice at random nor by caprice, but with the most consummate wisdom according to the wise ends he had in view; neither can we suppose that he will capriciously alter the laws and order he has once established; but then, as they are not self-necessary, but depend entirely upon his will, it cannot be denied that he can alter, change, or even annihilate them, if, and when he pleases. Again, the material world, as far as our reason can see, is in itself perfectly indifferent to be in its present form, or in any other form whatever, to be guided by its present laws or any other; nor can we have the smallest notion of good or evil accruing to material or insensible creatures, whatever change or alteration we may imagine to happen in their present forms, or in those laws of nature by which they are at present guided. It makes no odds to a particle of matter whether it be employed to compose the sun or a dunghill, whether it shines in the form of gold, or is trampled under foot in the form of mud; it is neither more or less happy, nor more or less virtuous, in the one case than in the other; because, in fact, it is incapable either of happiness or misery, vice or virtue. *Lastly*, Neither can we possibly imagine that any change in matter, or its laws, should, in the smallest degree, affect the happiness of God, to whom, considering it only with regard to his own happiness, and independently of any particular design he



he may have in view, it must be perfectly indifferent whether the material world be of this form, or of that, be guided by its present laws, or by any other, or, indeed, whether it has any existence at all or not. From all which it seems evidently to follow, that the whole material creation, with its present order and laws, are not in themselves the immediate and ultimate objects of the divine will, intended by God in establishing them; they are only the means for procuring those ends which the divine wisdom had in view to be obtained by them; they are, therefore, neither good nor evil in themselves, but only in so far as they conduce to promote or hinder those ends for which they have their existence.

III. From all these evident principles, then, the following reasoning naturally flows. As the conserving or suspending the laws of nature is neither good nor evil in itself, but only in so far as it conduces to, or hinders some good end; as the possibility both of the one and of the other is perfectly the same with regard to Almighty God, who with equal ease can either preserve, suspend, or even destroy these laws entirely: On the other hand, as the procuring the happiness or moral perfection of intelligent creatures, which is procuring a real good, and hindering their misery or moral turpitude, which is hindering a real evil, are objects truly worthy of the divine wisdom and goodness

to procure, and what he actually wills and desires, therefore the suspending the laws of nature, in order to procure these ends, is a conduct truly worthy the divine wisdom and goodness to observe. And if it be thus worthy of Almighty God, even to suspend those general laws which he has made in the creation, in order to obtain those ends, it is no less so to exert his almighty power in producing other effects in the material world superior to the powers of all created agents, when the procuring the said ends makes it necessary or proper to do so; *that is*, in other words, that the procuring the happiness or moral perfection of intelligent creatures, and the hindering their misery and moral turpitude, are ends truly worthy the divine interposition, even by MIRACLE.

IV. But to place this matter in a still more striking point of view, let us consider what those ends are which the divine wisdom had in view in creating this universe, and in establishing its present laws and order; for, if at any time the case should happen wherein a suspension of these laws, or an alteration of the present order, might be requisite for the more easy or the more essential procuring these ends, it would then be not only becoming and worthy the divine goodness and wisdom so to suspend the laws, or alter the present order of things, but it would even be in some degree incumbent upon him to do so; and if in this inquiry

inquiry we find that the procuring the happiness and perfection of intelligent creatures was certainly one of the principal, if not the ultimate end of the creation, the above conclusion will appear with a double lustre, and shine forth with the most incontestible evidence.

V. Now, whether we examine this matter by the light of reason only, or by taking a view of those beneficent purposes which manifestly appear throughout the whole creation, or from the light that revelation gives us concerning it, we shall evidently see that this is actually the case; namely, that the procuring the happiness of intelligent creatures is one of the principal, if not the ultimate end of the creation. For, first, let us suppose there were no rational or intelligent creatures upon earth, nothing but inanimate matter and the brute creation, what idea can we form of such a work from the hand of an all-wise and an all-powerful being? Can we see it in any degree becoming such a being to create such a world? What satisfaction can we imagine it could give him, to see inanimate matter formed and moved in such and such a manner, and a parcel of irrational creatures, without any judgment or reflection, wandering up and down upon the face of the earth? Could the actual existence of such a world make the smallest difference to him in point of happiness, from the lively idea he must have of it, and of all possible worlds, in his own mind? For my own part, I cannot comprehend



it should : and to me it would seem altogether unbecoming a being of infinite perfection to create such a world as this would be. But allow rational and intelligent creatures to be placed in this world, the case is immediately changed. These are capable of knowing the God who made them, of understanding the wise and beneficent purposes which shine forth in his works, of rising up from thence to a sense of his amiable perfections, of admiring, loving, serving, praising and adoring their great Creator, and of enjoying a sublime happiness, a divine kind of pleasure in doing so. The feelings of our own heart immediately tell us, that to receive such voluntary and just service from intelligent and free creatures must be agreeable to the Creator, and a source of joy and happiness to him, and consequently worthy of him to procure for himself; and also that to make such creatures happy, and to provide for them all means necessary for being so, is no less worthy the infinite goodness of this sovereign mind, must afford a new joy and pleasure to himself, and therefore is an object becoming him to procure. From all which we justly conclude, “ That the rational and intelligent creatures are by far the chief and most excellent part of the creation; that without them all the rest would be to little or no purpose; that they are the principal object of the care and attention of the Creator; that all inferior beings are made only to be, either mediately or immediately, subservient to their happiness and perfection,

\* tion, and have no use but for this purpose; and  
‘ consequently that the happiness and perfection  
‘ of intelligent creatures is one of the greatest, if  
‘ not the ultimate end of the creation.”

VI. If now, in the second place, we open our eyes, and take a view of the works of God in that portion of them which falls under our examination, how strongly will this lead us to the same conclusion? For what do we find in all the creatures around us but the most manifest and convincing proofs, that the grand intention of Almighty God in creating them was, that they might all concur and co-operate to the happiness and moral excellence of man? and with what admirable design, with what consummate wisdom are they formed to do so! to our happiness by supplying all our wants, relieving our necessities, and contributing to our pleasure, contentment and ease! and that in the most sensible manner, and not sparingly, but with superabundance; to our moral excellence and perfection, by displaying to our understanding in the most amiable colours the infinite power, wisdom, and goodness of their Creator, and by engaging our hearts from the most powerful motives of duty and gratitude to love, serve, praise and adore the kind, the beneficent Author of all our happiness! It is true, indeed, the malice of the heart of man too, too often perverts the creatures from those great ends for which they were created,

ed, prostituting them, in the most ungrateful manner, to the very opposite and worst of purposes; but this does not in the smallest degree alter our view of the original design of Almighty God in creating them; that still shines forth in the midst of all the bad uses to which the wickedness of man perverts them, and the rational and impartial enquirer must still confess, "That the happiness and moral excellence of man is one of the greatest, if not the ultimate end for which they have their being."

VII. I say, *if not the ultimate end*, because reason alone, unassisted by revelation, though it clearly discerns that the happiness and perfection of man must be one of the chief ends for which the material world was created, yet not being able to penetrate farther with certainty, finds many difficulties in concluding it to be the ultimate or only end; now these difficulties arise from that deluge of moral turpitude which overspreads the face of the earth, and those numberless miseries to which human nature is daily exposed; and the solution of these difficulties can only be had from revelation. If, therefore, in the third place, we examine the light which revelation gives us in this matter, we shall find that it smoothes all the difficulties of natural reason, confirms the conclusion which reason makes, and, by going a step further, improves her light, and sets the point in question in



in the clearest view. What we find then revealed to us by Almighty God himself concerning his design in creating the universe is as follows: 1<sup>st</sup>, That the first, the principal, the ultimate end which he had in view in giving existence to creatures was for his own pleasure, for his own honour and glory; to display the magnificence of his divine perfections and excellencies to beings capable of knowing them, and to receive from them that homage of servitude and praise, which their essential dependence on him, and those his divine perfections most justly demand from them: Thus we are expressly taught in holy writ, that *The Lord made all things for himself*. Prov. xvi. 4. Again, 2<sup>dly</sup>, That his primary and chief design was to procure this grand, this ultimate end of the creation, *his own glory*, by the moral excellence and happiness of his rational creatures and their voluntary service; for this purpose he endues them, with free-will, instructs them both by the light of reason implanted within their breasts, and also by the external revelation of his will to them wherein this their perfection consists; gives them every kind of help necessary for acquiring it; engages them to apply themselves earnestly to the pursuit of it, by the most sacred promises of making them eternally and perfectly happy; deters them from the contrary conduct by threatening them with the most dreadful of all conceivable miseries; declares to them in the most amiable manner his infinite goodness.

ness and love to them; assures them that he wills not their death nor misery, but, on the contrary, that he most ardently desires their eternal life and happiness, and has given them the most unexceptionable proof of the sincerity of this desire in what he has done and suffered for them: That, however, having made them free agents, he will not force them, but leaves it to their own choice to comply or not as they please with this great end of their creation, the promoting his honour and glory by means of their own perfection and happiness. But then, *3dly*, If they refuse to comply with what their great Creator thus bounteously demands from them; if, by abusing their liberty, they refuse to promote his honour and glory by their own perfection and happiness, will his views be disappointed? will his intentions be frustrated? will he be deprived of that glory he proposed to himself by creating them? by no means; this is impossible: God created them for his own glory, which he absolutely wills to procure by his creatures; and to this grand, to this ultimate end they must all co-operate whether they will or not: his primary intention and first desire is, that they should do so by means of their own perfection and happiness; but if, by the abuse of their free-will, they refuse to comply with this, he then has recourse to a secondary intention, which is to inflict sufferings and misery upon them as the just punishment of their infidelity and ingratitude; and

and thus, whilst they refuse to glorify his goodness and mercy, he obliges them, whether they will or not, to exalt and set forth the glory of his justice : Or in other words, the chief and principal design of the Almighty God, in the works of creation, is to promote his own honour and glory by the moral perfection and happiness, both temporal and eternal, of his rational creatures; that for this purpose all other creatures have their existence, the principal view of the Creator in making them being, that they might co-operate and serve as instruments and means for promoting the happiness and perfection of rational creatures here, and consequently their eternal salvation hereafter. But however, if these his rational creatures, abusing the free-will he has given them, refuse to comply with the first and primary design of their great Creator, *viz.* their promoting his glory by their own perfection and happiness; and if, instead of using the other inferior creatures as means to procure this end, they abuse them contrary to the design of Almighty God, against his will, and consequently to his displeasure; that then his secondary design in the works of the creation is still to procure his own honour and glory, not now by the perfection and happiness of his rational creatures, which they have refused to comply with, but by their misery and destruction; obliging them, by this means, whether they will or not, to secure the exaltation and glory of his justice, since they  
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had so ungratefully refused to promote that of his mercy, and making use of the other creatures now, which were primarily intended for their happiness, as the just instruments of their punishment for the abuse they made of them.

VIII. It would carry us to too great a length to cite here the numberless testimonies of holy writ, wherein Almighty God has discovered to us these his views and ends in creating this universe; nor, indeed, is it at all necessary, seeing the whole tenor and scope of revealed truths rest upon them. But, from considering what is here said, we see a clear and full solution of those difficulties, which reason alone could not penetrate in her researches into those matters: We see the cause of that deluge of vice and immorality which reigns so widely in the world, *viz.* the abuse of that liberty which God has bestowed upon us as free agents; and we see also whence all those miseries flow, under which we daily groan, namely, not from any want of goodness in God, who takes no pleasure in our sufferings as such, but from the malice of our own hearts in abusing our liberty, which forces Almighty God, contrary to his primary intention, to inflict these sufferings upon us as the just punishment of our crimes: and from the same principles the main point we have here in view flows as a natural and necessary consequence, *viz.* "That  
' the rational and intelligent creatures are by far  
the

‘ chief and most excellent part of the creation ;  
‘ that without them all the rest are of little or no  
‘ signification ; that they are the principal object of  
‘ the care and attention of the Creator ; that all o-  
‘ ther inferior beings are made only to be, either  
‘ mediately or immediately, subservient to their  
‘ happiness and perfection, and have no use but  
‘ for this purpose : Consequently, since all infe-  
‘ rior creatures, and of course the whole pre-  
‘ sent order and laws of nature, are only esta-  
‘ blished as subservient to the above great ends,  
‘ it is not only reasonable, but most highly becom-  
‘ ing and worthy the infinite wisdom and good-  
‘ ness of God to suspend any of these laws, to  
‘ alter the present order of things, or to per-  
‘ form any other miraculous effect he pleases,  
‘ when the promoting his own honour and glory,  
‘ either by procuring the happiness and perfection  
‘ of his rational creatures, or by averting their  
‘ misery and moral turpitude, or even by inflicting  
‘ just punishments upon them, may require his do-  
‘ ing so. Nay, should the case happen wherein  
‘ these ends could not so properly nor so perfectly  
‘ be acquired by other ordinary means, it would  
‘ then be not only becoming Almighty God, but  
‘ it would even be in some sort incumbent upon  
‘ him to work a miracle, in order to procure  
‘ them.”

K IX. But

IX. But it will, perhaps, be here objected, why may not the divine wisdom procure these ends sufficiently by natural and ordinary means, without having recourse to miracles? In answer to this we must observe, 1. That all I have affirmed in the former part of the above conclusion is, that the procuring moral good, and preventing moral evil, are objects truly worthy of the goodness of God to interpose in, even though by miracle: There is no doubt but he may procure them by natural means, if, and when he pleases; but as we have seen that they are in themselves so valuable as to be an immediate object of the divine will, and, on the contrary, that the preserving or suspending the laws of nature is by no means a primary object of God's desire, nor contains either good or evil in itself, considered independently of any moral good end to be obtained by it, consequently, if the former good ends can be more easily or better obtained by a temporary suspension of these laws, or by any other supernatural operation performed by Almighty God for that purpose, it would be highly reasonable, and most becoming the divine wisdom so to suspend these laws, or perform that operation, in order thereby the more easily or better to procure them. And if a case at any time should happen in which these ends could not be obtained by ordinary natural means, on this supposition it will be in some sort incumbent on Almighty God, if he wills the ends, to perform the miracle  
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in order to obtain them ; which is the last part of of the above conclusion. But, 2. It does not belong to us to judge what means are most proper for the divine wisdom and goodness actually to use, whether natural or miraculous, in order to procure these ends ; they are both equally easy to him, and he is at perfect freedom to use which of them he pleases ; and the Christian religion assures us, that he uses sometimes the one and sometimes the other ; sometimes procures the sanctity and perfection of his servants by ordinary and natural means, and sometimes uses miraculous and supernatural means for this purpose, according as he in his wisdom judges most proper to be done. But, 3. It will not, I think, be denied, that it is most becoming the divine goodness and wisdom to use those means for attaining his views which are most proper and conducive thereto : Now, it is undoubted that miraculous interpositions of the divine power are much more efficacious for procuring moral good, and preventing moral evil, in intelligent creatures, than all the ordinary natural means by the agency of second causes can be : the reason of which is very plain ; because, tho' all the objects about us present us with numberless proofs of the divine perfections, and excite us in the most powerful manner to love and serve their great Creator, yet these objects, by custom, become familiar, and the mind being habituated to them, ceases to attend to the great instructions

they contain, and to take occasion from them to elevate her thoughts to their glorious Author, and render him that worship and service which he so justly deserves from us, and which they so loudly call upon us to render unto him. But when a miracle is performed, this rouses our attention, and awakens us out of our lethargy, makes the divine presence more sensible to us, and excites in our minds all those holy sentiments and affections of respect, fear, veneration, love, gratitude, and the like, which the wonderful things around us would also do, did they not by custom lose their force and efficacy for that purpose. It is a most incomprehensible effect of the divine power and goodness to multiply a few grains, when sown in the ground, to such an amazing quantity of corn as to afford food sufficient for thousands; but being used to see this every day, we think nothing of it, and seldom or never take occasion from it to excite in our hearts suitable affections to the great Author of so stupenduous a benefit. But were these natural and ordinary means to fail, as in time of famine, and should God then, by his almighty power, multiply a handful of meal in our granaries, so as amply to supply our wants till plenty should return to the land, what admirable effects would this excite in our hearts! what admiration! what thanks! what gratitude, love, confidence, and the like! And why so? Not because this last is more difficult to Almighty God than

than the former, or a greater effort of his power; not because it is more wonderful in itself, but because it is unusual to us, because it is extraordinary, and because upon that account it more strikingly shows the hand of God, and makes us more sensible both of his divine presence and power, and of his infinite goodness towards us.

X. The learned authors of the Christian Magazine, in their dissertations intitled, *The Truth of the Christian Religion Vindicated*, P. 159. speak on this subject as follows: "Without doubt the  
 ' general order of nature perfectly displays the  
 ' greatness of the supreme Being; but this order,  
 ' thus perpetual and constant, shouts to the deafest  
 ' ears, and speaks aloud to the most obdurate  
 ' hearts. This is a continual miracle, and one  
 ' that comprehends a multitude of miracles; but  
 ' yet in vain does it seek to call back mortals to  
 ' the knowledge of their Maker. We are accus-  
 ' tomed to every object in nature; the great  
 ' wonders of the world are fallen into a kind of  
 ' disparagement and disregard, and no longer strike  
 ' our attention, because they are ever present.—  
 ' It is the same God who every day works all those  
 ' miracles wherewith nature is replete; and those  
 ' which are less common and more remarkable.  
 ' But because custom induces forgetfulness of the  
 ' grandeur of the former; because mankind, divert-  
 ' ed by many objects, no longer attend to ordina-



' ry events, or take occasion from them to elevate  
 ' their minds to their almighty Dispenser, and to  
 ' render him that worship which therefore is so  
 ' justly his due; on these accounts, and in ama-  
 ' zing condescension to our weakness, he hath  
 ' graciously reserved certain *extraordinary* events,  
 ' which he assiduously takes care from time to  
 ' time to produce, with a view to arouse mankind  
 ' from their lethargy of negligence. If these less  
 ' usual miracles have a more striking effect upon  
 ' us than others, it is not that they are more ex-  
 ' cellent than those of which we are daily specta-  
 ' tors, but that, being less frequent, they render  
 ' us more sensible of the presence of their Au-  
 ' thor."

Seeing, therefore, that miracles are thus a much  
 more powerful means to procure the moral perfec-  
 tion of intelligent beings than the ordinary means  
 from second causes, it follows of course, that Al-  
 mighty God not only may procure these good  
 ends by such miraculous operations, but that it is  
 most worthy his divine goodness, and highly be-  
 coming his infinite power and wisdom from time to  
 time to do so.

## CHAP. V.

*On the Ends of MIRACLES, as discovered to us  
by REVELATION.*

I. **H**AVING seen what those ends are which, by the light of reason, appear worthy of Almighty God to procure by miracles, we now proceed to examine what revelation points out to us on this subject. Several of the principles which we have made use of above are not only evident to reason and common sense, but are also, as we have seen, conformable to, and established by revelation; which gives them a double lustre and efficacy: but it will put the conclusion we have drawn from these principles beyond all contradiction, if, upon a further inquiry, we shall find that it is the very same which revelation itself discovers to us in this matter. That this is really the case, I think, may easily be made appear by an argument the most convincing of any, and fitted for the meanest capacity; I mean the consideration of facts related and attested by God himself in the holy scriptures. There cannot be a more certain way of knowing what is becoming Almighty God to do than by considering what he has in fact already done; and as he has performed numbers  
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of miracles in different ages among his people, which he has carefully recorded in his holy scriptures for our instruction, if we attentively consider the ends for which these miracles were wrought, and which were actually obtained by them, we must of necessity conclude, that these ends were most worthy of the divine interposition by miracles, because expressly judged by almighty wisdom itself to be so. And if we farther see that these ends are the very same which, by the light of reason, we have found worthy of such interposition, this will illustrate the above conclusion of reason in the most convincing manner, and put it beyond all possibility of doubt, at least with those who believe the scriptures. But, before we proceed to consider the facts themselves, it will be necessary to premise a few observations upon what is understood by the moral perfections of intelligent creatures.

II. *First,* then, as Almighty God is a Being of infinite perfections in himself, and cannot possibly contradict himself by willing any thing contrary to his own divine perfections, it follows, that the divine will is the sovereign rule and standard of all righteousness and perfection; consequently our perfection as rational and intelligent creatures must consist in our resemblance of God, *that is*, in our thinking and acting conformable to his will, in having such sentiments, and in pursuing such a tenor of conduct as he requires from us; and the more

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we resemble God in this respect, the more holy, the more righteous, the more perfect we are. This is what our blessed Saviour so warmly recommends to us when he says, *Be ye perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect*; and which he explains and confirms by his own example, when he assures us, that *his meat was to do the will of him that sent him*; and that this was the very ultimate end of his incarnation, *I came down from heaven not to do my own will, says he, but to do the will of him that sent me.*

Secondly, When we consider such of the divine perfections as we are acquainted with, we immediately perceive a necessary connection betwixt them, and certain affections and dispositions of our minds, and a corresponding mode of action naturally resulting from these dispositions: These dispositions appear to us as natural consequences of those divine perfections from which they flow, and as most justly due to that sovereign Being in whom these perfections reside. Thus the infinite power of God demands from us the most religious respect and veneration; his infinite justice requires our most awful fear of offending; his infinite veracity our most firm and unshaken belief in his word; his infinite sanctity our most pious veneration; his infinite wisdom our perfect submission to the orders and dispositions of his providence; his infinite goodness and innumerable benefits bestow-  
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ed on us, loudly call for our most ardent love, gratitude, and confidence in him; his sovereign dominion demands our most profound subjection and intire obedience; and all these his divine perfections together essentially require, upon our part, the most perfect resignation to his holy will, and an absolute and intire dependence upon him in every thing. The connection betwixt those divine perfections and these their corresponding dispositions in us, is evident at first sight to all who understand the terms, and the light by which we perceive it is a constitutional part of the human frame; it stands in no need of arguments to prove it; it convinces by being proposed and understood as much as any first principle whatsoever. Consequently this connection is real; the divine perfections do actually require these corresponding duties and affections from us; it is the proper worship due to God from his creatures; it is therefore his will we should render it to him, and our perfection consists in doing so. The same observations take place with regard to the feelings we have in our souls of the nature and obligations of our other moral duties; of which Mr Beattie, in his Essay on Truth, very justly says, *The performance of certain actions, and the indulgence of certain affections, is attended with an agreeable feeling of a peculiar kind, which I call moral approbation; different actions and affections excite the opposite feeling of moral disapprobation: To relieve distress I find to be meritorious*

meritorious and praise-worthy; to pick a pocket I know to be blameable, and worthy of punishment; I am conscious that some actions are in my power, that others are not; that when I neglect to do what I ought to do, and can do, I deserve to be punished; and that when I act necessarily, or upon unavoidable and irresistible compulsion, I deserve neither punishment nor blame. Of all these sentiments I am as conscious and as certain as I am of my own existence. I cannot prove that I feel them, neither to myself nor to others; but that I do really feel them, is as evident to me as demonstration could make it.—I ought to be grateful for a favour received: Why? Because my conscience tells me so. How do you know you ought to do that of which your conscience enjoins the performance? I can give no further reason for it, but that I feel that such is my duty. And here the investigation must stop; or, if carried a little further, it must return to this point—I know that I ought to do what my conscience enjoins, because God is the Author of my constitution, and I obey his will when I act according to the principles of my constitution. Why do you obey the will of God? Because it is my duty. How do you know that? Because my conscience tells me so, &c. Part I. § 3. To these just reflections we must further add, that we not only feel within us this sense of moral duty, this something which pushes us on to do, or not do, certain actions, and to have, or not have, certain affections; but, which is particularly to be remarked, when



when we are conscious to ourselves of having these affections, and of acting conformably to them, we immediately feel the applause and approbation of this internal monitor, attended with a peaceful joy and content of mind; and when we have them not, or act contrary to them, we are immediately punished by internal remorse and self-condemnation, as having acted in a manner contrary to our duty, and unworthy the dignity of our nature. The result of all these observations is, that the perfection of our nature consists in having such dispositions, and following such a mode of conduct as is agreeable to the will of our Creator, and such as he, who is our Sovereign Master, requires from us, and points out to us by this internal light which he has implanted in us.

*Thirdly*, If we examine what God Almighty has declared to us by revelation concerning this matter, we find it intirely the same with what is above. *Let us hear*, says he by the mouth of the wise man, *the conclusion of the whole matter, fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole of man.* Eccles. xii. *that is*, his whole duty, his whole happiness, his whole perfection; in a word, *his all*. And, indeed, throughout the whole scriptures, what do we find demanded of mankind by the great Author of our being, but to believe in him, to fear him, to hope in him, to thank and praise him, to serve and obey him; and, which comprehends

comprehends all other duties in one word, to love and prefer him above all things, and to be ready to leave all things rather than, by sin, to offend and lose him? In the practice of these holy virtues the perfection of our duty consists, and consequently in the same consists the perfection of our souls.

*Fourthly,* If we had no other feelings or inclinations in our hearts but these above-mentioned, it would be an easy matter to comply with our duty, and to render to our great Creator that just tribute of obedience and love which is so strictly due to him. But we find, from experience, that this is far from being the case; for we feel within our breasts another kind of principle, quite opposite to the former; a violent bent and propensity to those things which our moral sense condemns: this strongly tends to avert our affections from God and place them on the creatures, and at the same time obscures the above holy feelings, blunts the happiness the soul would enjoy in encouraging them, and persuades us to seek for happiness only in such sensual enjoyments as are intirely opposite to, and destructive of the above-mentioned duties dictated to us by our conscience. This bent and inclination of the heart, which is called the sensual appetite, and our moral sense or conscience being thus intirely opposite and contradictory to one another, are at perpetual variance between  
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themselves, and excite that fight and war in our breasts, which is so afflicting to pious souls, and which St Paul so pathetically describes from his own experience: *I know, says he, that in me (that is in my flesh) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me, but how to perform that which is good, I find not: for the good that I would I do not, but the evil which I would not, that I do.—I delight in the law of God after the inward man: But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin, which is in my members. O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death!* Rom. vii. As these two principles are thus so opposite to one another, it is plainly impossible fully to satisfy them both; and we find by experience, that the more we encourage and gratify the one, the more we discourage and weaken the other. Hence, it is impossible our Creator should have implanted both these in our nature, with the view and intention that they should both be fully indulged and gratified. The question then is, which of the two ought we to hear, which ought we to reject? Which ought we to comply with, which to discourage? A little attention to their different qualities will easily answer these questions: For *first*, We find the moral sense is always attended with the feeling of its being our duty to follow its calls; the sensual appetite has no such feeling joined



joined to it, but consists in a blind impetuous bent of the heart towards its sensual objects. *Secondly*, Our compliance with the dictates of conscience is always followed with internal approbation, and a sense of having done well; and this approbation is always the greater the more violent the solicitations of sensuality have been against our doing so: But when we indulge the inclinations of the sensual appetite, we find no such self-approbation, but, on the contrary, we are tormented with remorse and self-condemnation, which is always the more severe the greater length we had gone in sensual gratifications. *Lastly*, The most noble and exalted idea we can form to ourselves of human nature, is that of a person who should be intirely guided by the dictates of duty and conscience, and never influenced in any part of his conduct by selfish and sensual motives; and on the other hand, the most despicable idea we can have of our species, is that of a person enslaved to his passions, and totally lost to all sense of duty or moral virtue. From these observations it plainly follows, that our moral sense is placed in us as the delegate of God, to be under him our guide and director, and consequently that our constant endeavours ought to be to follow its dictates, and to mortify and subdue all risings of the sensual appetite to the contrary.

*Fifthly*, The light of revelation strongly confirms this last conclusion ; for by it we are assured that at the beginning man was not created with such jarring principles within him, but that the opposition to our duty which we at present feel from sensuality, is owing to the depravation of our nature from its original rectitude by sin ; that the rebellion of sensuality is a defect of our nature, which it ought to be our daily care to amend, and that our perfection consists in opposing and mortifying all its corrupt inclinations, and by that means asserting the liberty of our souls, that we may with the greater ease and ardour be united to our Creator, and render him that worship and homage which he requires from us. But to do this as we ought is no less difficult than important. Our blessed Saviour calls it a doing violence to ourselves ; St Paul, with all the saints, complains of the great pain and trouble which this spiritual warfare cost him ; and experience daily shows, from the small number of those who have courage in earnest to undertake and go through it, and from the many furious battles and rude assaults they have to sustain who do so, how arduous is the task to overcome this corrupt nature of ours ; but of course how glorious the victory ! On the other hand, Almighty God, who most ardently desires we should gain this victory, because it alone will intitle us to the crown of incorruptible glory, for

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none shall be crowned but he who has lawfully fought, leaves nothing undone on his part to encourage and enable us to make this sacred conquest; he incites us to it by the strictest commands; by the most affectionate solicitations; by threatening us with the most dreadful evils if we neglect it; by promising us the most endearing happiness if we obtain it; by assuring us that he is always at hand to assist us, and will never suffer us to be tempted above what we are able to bear, but, if we be not wanting on our part, will always give us strength to come off with victory. 1. Cor. x. and (which properly belongs to our present purpose, and I shall fully display here), by declaring to us in his own sacred word, that in order to engage his people the more effectually in this warfare, and enable them to resist their sensuality, and promote the perfection of their souls, by adorning them with the above-mentioned holy virtues, he has at different times, and on many different occasions, been pleased to perform the most stupendous and amazing miracles; from which our conclusion necessarily follows, that to procure the moral perfection of our souls is an end worthy of the divine interposition by miracles, and which Almighty God himself judges to be so, having actually wrought numbers of miracles for that purpose.



*Sixthly*, When we consider that incomprehensible and interminable bliss which is prepared for the good, and that eternal punishment which awaits the wicked in the next world, it will easily be allowed that all we can enjoy or suffer in this life is a mere nothing, and disappears intirely when put in competition with the other; and consequently, that it is a matter of the smallest importance how we be in this mortal pilgrimage, provided we can only avoid hell and obtain heaven when we come to the end of our journey. What did all the wealth and enjoyments of the rich glutton avail him, when at his death he was buried in hell-fire, where he could not command a single drop of water to cool his parched tongue? and, on the contrary, what worse was the poor beggar Lazarus for all his sufferings in this life, when at his death his soul was carried to a place of rest and peace, and he is now in possession of the fullness of celestial joy and happiness? As, therefore, we are placed in this world for no other end but to work out and secure our salvation, and as all the goods and evils of this life are so disposed by the divine providence that they may serve as means for acquiring this end, it is therefore a most certain truth, that they in no other respect deserve to be valued or esteemed by us, than in so far as they conduce to our avoiding eternal misery, and acquiring eternal happiness. If, therefore, the abundance of the goods of this life should in us, as in the rich glutton,

glutton, prove a hinderance to that great end, we ought doubtless to look upon them as the greatest of evils; and, on the contrary, if the suffering all the miseries this world can inflict upon us should prove the means of more effectually securing our salvation, as was the case with Lazarus, we ought to esteem these miseries as the greatest and most valuable blessings. It is true, indeed, it requires one to be arrived at a great degree of Christian perfection to have an experimental persuasion of this truth; and it must be owned, that by far the greatest bulk of mankind are exceedingly affected with present goods and evils: We are naturally bent on procuring and enjoying the former, as if we were capable of no other happiness but what we receive from them; and we have the utmost aversion for the latter, as if they were the only real evils: in consequence of this natural disposition of our hearts, nothing makes a greater impression upon us than to be plentifully supplied with the one, and to be defended and delivered from the other; and whilst this disposition does not prove a hinderance to our eternal happiness, but is properly regulated by reason and religion, it is far from being blameable, but may be made to serve for the best of purposes. This frame of the human mind Almighty God well knows, and therefore condescending with amazing goodness to our weakness, he makes use of it as a means to engage us the more in his service, by promising to give us  
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all the necessary good things of this life, and to preserve us from its evils, so far as is consistent with our eternal happiness, if we continue faithful and obedient to him: And in order to convince us the more affectingly of his sincerity in this promise, he has been pleased, on numberless occasions, so to order the miracles he wrought in favours of his servants, for the advancement of their souls in virtue, that they should at the same time procure them the greatest temporal blessings, or deliver them from temporal miseries and dangers. By this means, such miracles make the deeper impression on the mind, and more effectually excite those holy sentiments of gratitude and love, which he requires from us. And, on the other hand, he not only threatens obdurate sinners with all manner of temporal evils, in order to frighten them from their wicked ways, but has even judged it worthy of himself to work most astonishing miracles in punishment of sinners, both with a view to their own conversion, and also from their examples to excite a salutary fear of offending him in the hearts of others. All which I shall now proceed to show from the facts themselves.

III. When God at the beginning created man, he gave him a full and sufficient knowledge of his Maker, and of the service which was due to him: But when, in process of time, from the corruption of man's heart by sin, he forgot his God and revolted



revolted from his service, the Supreme Being was pleased to make choice of one nation, which by a particular dispensation of his providence he would preserve from the general corruption, and always keep constant in the knowledge and service of the true God. This chosen people had been for a long time oppressed in a cruel manner by the Egyptians, who kept them in slavery, till at last the time arrived when the God of their fathers was resolved not only to deliver them from their bondage, but also to give them an ample external revelation of his will, and of all the worship and service which he required from them; *that is*, to plant his true religion among them, and to teach them the way to be truly happy here and hereafter. To do this several things were required; first, to convince them that it was he himself, the God of heaven and earth, who declared his will to them; secondly, to induce them to receive and obey his will so manifested to them; and, thirdly, to do this in a manner adapted to the frame of the human heart, by interesting the affections, especially those of love, hope, and fear, in the performance of what he required of them. Now, to gain these ends, we find that Almighty God was pleased to make use of miracles, and of such a profusion of them as plainly shows how much he esteems the moral perfection of the soul of man, tho' it should require the subversion of the most universal laws of nature to procure it. For this purpose, he  
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makes choice of his servant Moses ; appears to him in the wilderness in a very miraculous manner in a burning bush ; tells him who he is, what he has a mind to do for his people, and his intention to make use of him as his instrument for that end. Had Moses all at once agreed to this proposal, had he seemed pleased with the charge and honour conferred upon him, and been elated in his own mind on that account, it might have been alledged that this was all a delusion, and that Moses was only the dupe of his own heated imagination. But this is so far from being the case, that Moses, on hearing the intention of God, is vastly alarmed, objects against the proposal, refuses to undertake the charge, and alleges several excuses from the difficulty of the enterprise, his own incapacity ; and lastly, from the people themselves, who would give no credit to him, a single person, who had been long out from among them, and of course little known, except perhaps by name, to the most of them. To obviate these difficulties, and convince Moses himself that this was the work of God, and at the same time to give him credentials with the people, and assure them of his divine commission, what does the Almighty do ? he comes to miracles as the proper means for this purpose ; he turns the rod of Moses into a serpent, and then into a rod again ; he in an instant makes his hand white with leprosy, and in an instant restores it again to its former soundness ; and he not only

only performs these miracles before Moses for his own satisfaction, but he gives him the power of doing them also before the people for their conviction; for thus he speaks to him after turning his rod into a serpent, *that they may believe that the Lord God of their Fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob hath appeared unto thee.* *Exod. iv. 5.* And a little after he tells him, that if the people should not give credit to these first signs, then he should turn the water of the river, when poured out upon the dry land, into red blood in their presence. By these miracles Moses is convinced, he undertakes the charge, goes to the people, delivers his commission, and performs the miracles as his credentials: These had immediately the desired effect; for when the people were called together, and Aaron spoke all these words which the Lord had spoken unto Moses, *and DID THE SIGNS in the sight of the people, the people believed, and bowed down their heads and worshipped.* *Exod. iv. 30, 31.*

IV. Here then one main point was gained by means of miracles: the people of Israel were convinced that Moses was sent by the God of their fathers to deliver them from their present misery, and carry them to the promised land. It is true this was the easiest part Moses had to do: The affliction under which the people groaned, their ardent desire to be delivered from it, the expectation they had



had that their deliverance would certainly come, and they be freed from that Egyptian slavery, and brought to the possession of that happy land which had been so often promised by Almighty God to their forefathers, would doubtless dispose their minds readily to embrace every proposal of that kind, and to give all manner of credit to every appearance of the approach of that happiness which they so much desired and expected. But it was not so easy a matter to convince Pharoah: He had none of these prejudices in favour of Moses or his commission; on the contrary, he had the strongest bias against it, both from his religious principles, and from his worldly interest; accordingly, tho' God Almighty commanded the same miracles to be wrought in his presence as had served to convince the Israelites (*See* *Exod. vii.*), they made no impression on him; nay, he looked upon them all as an imposture, and called in his own magicians, who by their enchantments performed the same things that Moses did. See here the admirable conduct of the divine providence; he permits this opposition of Pharoah; he permits his magicians to exert their utmost power, and to imitate the miracles wrought in his name, on purpose to show their determined will to oppose what he required, and how averse they were from any design of favouring Moses, which might have been suspected had they all at once, without opposition, acknowledged the divinity of his commission and miracles. But after  
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permitting this contest of miracles for a time, God at last asserts his own honour, works, by the hand of his servant, such miracles as far exceeded all the power of the magicians, and forced from the mouth of these his declared enemies an express acknowledgment, *That the finger of God was there.* Nothing could be more honourable for the cause of God than this confession; nothing more convincing to his people that Moses was sent by him, and consequently nothing could more powerfully prepare their minds and hearts for receiving the religion he was soon after to reveal to them by the hands of this his holy servant. But Almighty God was pleased to do still more; Pharaoh, thro' the high permission of God's unsearchable judgments, still hardens his heart; and God immediately works more wonders; and as Pharaoh's hardness of heart proceeded chiefly from his worldly interest, which made him averse to comply with what God required in letting the people go, for fear they would not return, and he be thereby deprived of their service; therefore does God work such miracles as served both to prove the divine commission of Moses, and at the same time to punish Pharaoh in what he sinned, by destroying his country, his cattle, his goods, and his people, in order by this means the more readily to break his stubborn heart, and extort his consent to what God required of him. Now, in these miracles wrought for this end, we observe, first, that they were for the

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most part above all the power of the magicians; secondly, that they were generally foretold before they happened; thirdly, that they were taken away at the exact time appointed, and this appointment sometimes left to Pharaoh's own choice; fourthly, that they were commonly done at the word of Moses; fifthly, that a distinction was made between the Egyptians and the people of God, who were freed from those plagues with which the former were tormented; sixthly, that this last circumstance was foretold and done on purpose, as Almighty God says himself to Pharaoh, *That thou mayest know that I am the Lord in the midst of the earth.* Exod. viii. 22. These circumstances were clear proofs by whom these miracles were wrought, and tended evidently to imprint in the minds of Pharaoh and his servants, as well as of God's people, the most thorough conviction, that the Lord was the only true God, and that Moses was his servant commissioned and sent by him: And God himself assures us, that for this very purpose he wrought these miracles, attended with all their circumstances; for thus he says to Pharaoh, *I will at this time send all my plagues upon thy heart, and upon thy servants, and upon thy people, that thou mayest know there is none like me on all the earth.* Exod. ix. 14. and to his own people he says, that he showed all these his signs before Pharaoh, *That thou mayest tell in the ears of thy son, and of thy son's son, what things I have wrought*



*wrought in Egypt, and my signs which I have done amongst them, that ye may know that I am the Lord. Exod. x. 1, 2.*

V. In this manner does Almighty God show from his own conduct, how much he esteems the procuring the sanctification of his rational creatures, an end worthy of his interposing by working miracles; and we see also in what is above, how admirably his infinite wisdom adapts the miracles he performs to the end intended to be gained by them. He knew the hardness of Pharaoh's heart, and the source from whence it arose; it was necessary, therefore, that the miracles wrought, to convince him that Moses was sent from God, and to procure his obedience to the divine will, should be such as would strike at the root of the evil, and bend his hardened heart to a compliance with what God required from him: He knew also the rudeness of his own people, their obstinacy, their proneness to all the superstitions of the Egyptians, and how ready they would be to leave his service upon every occasion; it was therefore necessary that the miracles wrought, to prove that the commission of Moses was from God himself, should not be barely sufficient for this purpose, as was the turning the rod into a serpent, making his hand leprous, and changing water into blood; but also that they should be calculated for working upon the passions of the people; for con-

vincing them it was their only true interest to serve their God; for giving them a confidence in him, and for striking them with a salutary dread and fear of offending him. How admirably were the wonders wrought calculated for this purpose! The particular protection shown to his people, the visible difference made between them and the Egyptians, the design of their deliverance intended by all these wonders, and the actual accomplishment of it at last, were doubtless the most convincing proofs how much they were the favourites of heaven, and what happiness they might justly expect by faithfully serving that God who had done such great things for them. On the other hand, the severe and dreadful punishments sent on Pharaoh for his disobedience, could not fail to imprint in their hearts the deepest sentiments of fear and dread of offending, by letting them see what they had to expect if they should follow his example: And, whereas Moses was the person by whom God intended to discover his will to his people, and it was therefore necessary they should have the utmost reverence for him as the ambassador of God, for this reason all these miracles are wrought at the word of Moses; nature seems to be intirely at his command; he foretells beforehand the punishment to be inflicted on Pharaoh for his refusing to obey the orders of God delivered from his mouth, and upon his speaking the word, or lifting up his rod, or stretching out his hand,

hand, what he had foretold is forthwith brought to pass. What steps could have been taken more adapted to the ends proposed than these were? What could have conduced with greater efficacy to dispose this people to receive from the hands of Moses whatever revelation Almighty God should be pleased to make to them by his means?

VI. But the goodness of Almighty God did not stop here: No sooner are the people gone from Pharaoh, than immediately he exerts his Almighty power in their favours, by performing more stupendous miracles for this purpose than any they had hitherto seen. He had resolved, for his own wise ends, to conduct them through a wild and barren desert, where there was no path, nor any human guide to lead them; to supply this want, he sends an angel from heaven to be their conductor; this heavenly spirit, the more to benefit and assist the favourite people committed to his charge, takes upon him a visible form, and such an one as was intirely adapted to their necessities? *The Lord went before them by day in a pillar of a cloud, and by night in a pillar of fire, to give them light, to go by day and by night.* Exod. xiii. 21. He shows them the road they are to go; he covers them from the scorching heats of the sun by day, and dispells by his splendour the darkness of the night; he discovers to them the proper time for



proceeding on their journey, and when and how long they ought to take their rest: *When the cloud was taken up from the tabernacle, then after that the children of Israel journeyed, and in the place where the cloud abode, there the children of Israel pitched their tents; at the commandment of the Lord, the children of Israel journeyed, and at the commandment of the Lord they pitched; as long as the cloud abode upon the tabernacle they rested in their tents.* Num. ix. 17. 18. What sentiments of confidence and love must this continued proof of the divine goodness have naturally produced in this people!

VII. Pharaoh and his servants no sooner heard that the Israelites had fled, than forgetting all the scourges they had suffered upon their account, and vexation for the loss of their service getting the ascendant in their hearts, they repented of what they had done; *why have we done this, say they, that we have let Israel go from serving us?* Exod. xiv. 5. Pharaoh, therefore, immediately resolves to pursue them with his army and bring them back to their former slavery. His people readily agree to the proposal, and he comes upon the Israelites with all his hosts, at a place where they are hemmed in by the wilderness and the red sea, so that there was no human possibility for them to escape falling into his hands; but their great God again interposes in their behalf by new miracles; their heavenly conductor,

conductor, in the first place, changes his situation from front to rear, to be a barrier between his people and their enemies : *And the angel of God which went before the camp of Israel, removed and went behind them; and the pillar of cloud went from before their face and stood behind them; and it came between the camp of the Egyptians and the camp of Israel, and (see another miracle!) it was a cloud of darkness to them, but it gave light by night to these; so that the one came not near the other all the night.* *Exod. xiv. 19. 20.* Next morning, to complete their deliverance, Moses, by God's command, stretched forth his hand over the sea, and immediately it is divided into two parts, leaving the dry ground in the middle; and the waters standing up as a wall upon the right hand and upon the left: the Israelites astonished at this visible protection of heaven, boldly enter the untrodden path, and safely pass through to the other shore. The Egyptians blinded by their passion, and bent upon what they had in view, madly continue to follow them, in hopes at last to overtake them; but the time is now at hand appointed for completing the punishment of their obdurate hearts, and their madness proves their ruin. No sooner are the people of God safely got over, than Moses again stretches out his hand over the waters, as if to tell them they were now at liberty to return to their usual channel, *And immediately the sea returned to his strength, and covered the chariots and the*

*the horsemen, and all the hosts of Pharaoh—there remained not so much as one of them; and thus the Lord saved Israel that day out of the hands of the Egyptians, and Israel saw the Egyptians dead upon the sea-shore. Exod. xiv. 27. &c.* What a visible instance of the almighty hand of God! What a stupenduous miracle! What a suspension of the laws of nature! And all this, for what end? For that end surely which was actually produced by it; *And Israel saw that great work which the Lord did upon the Egyptians, and the people feared the Lord, and believed the Lord and his servant Moses. Exod. xiv. 31.* These were the great ends which Almighty God proposed by doing such wondrous things, to fill the hearts of his people with a salutary fear of offending him, and to gain authority and credit with them both for himself and his servant; and by this means dispose their minds for receiving with an intire submission that sacred law, which he was soon after going to reveal to them by the mouth of his holy prophet; consequently these are ends which God himself judges most worthy of his interposition by miracles, and even by miracles of the first rate, in order by their means the more effectually to procure them.

VIII. The more we proceed, the more convincing proofs we find of this truth in the conduct of the divine providence. The people being now entered



entered into that vast and barren wilderness, through which it pleased God to lead them, find themselves very soon exposed to all the calamities of hunger and thirst, and the utter want of all the necessities of life. In this dismal situation with misery and death staring them in the face; their hearts began to fail them; they murmured against Moses for bringing them out of Egypt *to kill them*, as they said, *in the wilderness*. Exod. xvi.

3. They looked upon all that had been done as his work alone, and called in doubt his being sent by Almighty God for their deliverance. This was doubtless most inexcusable in them, considering the many convincing proofs they had received of the divine mission of Moses; but the bowels of mercy of their God had pity upon them; and, condescending to their weakness, he again exerts his almighty power in their behalf, and wrought still more wonderful miracles among them, to convince them that not Moses of himself, but *that he their Lord had brought them out of the land of Egypt*. Exod. xvi. 6. *And ye shall know*, said he upon this occasion, *that I am the Lord your God*. verse 12. For this purpose he rains down upon them a most wonderful food from heaven, a food which was altogether miraculous, both in the manner of its being given and in all its properties. In order to try them, however, whether or not they were *really willing to walk in his law*. Exod. xvi. 4. and had that filial confidence in him, with which  
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so many wonders wrought in their favours ought justly to have inspired them, he orders only a certain quantity of this heavenly food to be gathered at a time, so much for each person by the day; but as he wanted the seventh day to be kept holy as his Sabbath, and spent in his service, without any avocation by worldly affairs, he allows a double quantity for each to be gathered on the sixth day to serve for this purpose; he also ordered that what was thus gathered each day should be made use of in that day, and that none of it should be left till next morning. It is easy to see the design of Almighty God in these orders, which was to try their obedience; to root out from their hearts all anxiety and solicitude for the concerns of this life, and to nourish in their souls a perfect confidence and total reliance on the divine providence and protection for every thing they stood in need of. Now, see the miraculous properties of this manna, and how excellently well it was adapted to those ends! When they went out to gather it, *some gathered more and some less* than the measure prescribed; *but when they brought it home and met it, he that gathered much had nothing over, and he that gathered little had no lack—some of them left of it till the morning, and it bred worms and stunk—but what remained over the sixth day, they laid it up till the morning—and it did not stink, neither was there any worm therein*; also it bore without difficulty all the force  
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of the fire, but melted with the slender heat of the rising sun; lastly, this miraculous food was rained down upon them every morning of the six days of the week, but *on the seventh day they found none*. See here what a collection of miracles which continued with that people, as a standing proof of the finger of God, during the space of forty years that they remained in the wilderness, and even till such time as they eat the new fruits of an inhabited land; nay, what is still more surprising, a measure of this very manna, which could not continue one night without corruption and worms when kept contrary to the command, was ordered by God to be laid up in the ark before the Lord, where it was preserved sound and uncorrupted for numbers of ages, that their latest *posterity might see the bread with which God fed them in the wilderness*, which was a standing and perpetual miracle among them. See for all this, *Exod. xvi.*

IX. The joy which this heavenly boon occasioned was soon damped for want of water, none of which was to be found in that dry and barren desert; upon which they began again to murmur, and immediately a new miracle is wrought to supply them; Moses strikes the hard rock with his rod, and it is forthwith melted down into a stream of limpid water, sufficient for that whole multitude and their cattle. *Exod. xvii.* Soon after this they began to tire of the manna, and calling to mind  
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the animal food, both fish and flesh, they had enjoyed in Egypt, they murmured again for want of them; and again a new miracle is wrought to gratify their desire, and give them flesh in abundance. Moses himself seemed confounded when God promised to supply them with flesh, looking upon it as a thing incredible in the place where they were: *The people, says he to Almighty God, are six hundred thousand footmen, and thou hast said I will give them flesh, that they may eat a whole month; shall the flocks and herds be slain for them to suffice them?* But God immediately checks him, by only putting him in mind who he was that promised it; *and the Lord said unto Moses, is the Lord's hand waxed short? Thou shalt see now whether my word shall come to pass unto thee or not;* and accordingly the very next day he sent them flesh to the full. Num. xi. Finally, to complete the proof of his affection for them, and thereby to increase their confidence and love for him, during the forty years he led them in the wilderness, he gave such force and durability to their cloaths, that from the day they came out of Egypt, during all that space of time, *your cloaths, as Moses expresses it to the people themselves, are not waxen old upon you, and thy shoe is not waxen old upon thy foot.* Deut. xxix. 5. In all which we see how much Almighty God thought it worthy of himself to perform the most amazing miracles, in order to gain the love and confidence of his people, and to dispose them to embrace,

embrace with all deference and respect the law and religion he was going to establish among them.

X. We come now to the revelation itself; and here we find a new scene opened to our view; a scene of miracles even superior, if possible, in their amazing greatness to any that had gone before them. Two days were employed before-hand to prepare the people for this great event, and upon the third day the great God descends in a visible form of fire in the sight of the whole multitude, attended with all those ensigns of majesty and grandeur which could render his appearance awful and tremendous; a thick cloud covers the mountain, the sound of trumpets is heard on all hands exceeding loud, flashes of lightning break forth from the clouds, peals of thunder roar on every side, and the whole mountain trembles with violent earthquakes; from the midst of this grand apparatus God himself, with an audible voice, speaks aloud to his people, and pronounces, with his own divine mouth, in the hearing of all the multitude, the sacred law which he was pleased to give them. The people, spectators of this awful scene, heard with amazement the heavenly voice; and seeing *the thunders and the lightning, and the noise of the trumpets, and the mountain smoking,* they were exceedingly afraid, and removed, and stood afar off, and said to Moses, *Speak thou to us and we will hear, but let not God speak to us lest we*

*die.* *Exod. xx.* Nothing could serve more effectually to convince this people that their God was the sovereign Lord of heaven and earth, than what they heard and saw upon this occasion; nothing could more deeply imprint in their minds a veneration and dread for that almighty Being who spoke to them in so awful a manner; nothing could contribute more to give the utmost respect for Moses, whom they saw so highly honoured by their great Creator, and to make them receive from him, with the most religious deference, whatever Almighty God should afterwards be pleased to reveal to them by his means, which was one principal end he had in view in his visible appearance among them, as he says himself to Moses, *Lo, I come unto thee in a thick cloud, that the people may hear when I speak with thee, and believe thee for ever.* *Exod. xix. 9.* But this deserves to be considered a little more particularly.

XI. In the first place we see, in the awful account given us of this memorable event, a striking example of the infinite goodness of God, and the ardent desire he has of the moral perfection of his rational creatures. What more convincing proof of this than to see this great Being condescend to reveal to them his holy will and law as the proper rule to conduct them to that perfection, and to do this in such a manner, and in such circumstances, as could not possibly fail to give them the most in-

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ture conviction that it was the God of nature himself, the sovereign Lord and Master of the universe, who spoke to them, whilst they saw with their own eyes how much all nature was subservient to him on this occasion? But as it would have been more than human frailty could bear, had all the particulars of the religion which God intended to give his people been delivered to them in so dreadful a manner, we see, in the second place, with what infinite wisdom Almighty God brings about his ends with the most undoubted certainty, but at the same time with the greatest sweetness; the awfulness of his appearance fills their minds with such dread and fear, that they themselves pray he would never speak to them again in such a manner, for they could not stand it. What he had already done had fully convinced them that he was their sole and sovereign Lord, and that Moses was sent and commissioned by him; that therefore it would be sufficient he declared to Moses what further orders he should please to give them, and they would receive them from him as the dictates of God himself. Now what was this but the very disposition of mind which God required from them, as the end proposed in all these wondrous works which he had wrought among them? And therefore, when they expressed themselves in this manner, he highly approved of what they said, and replied to Moses, *they have well spoken that which they have spoken.* Deut. xviii. 17.

*Lastly*, from this whole series of repeated miracles, of which we may justly say, that every one of them is more surprising than another, we have a most convincing proof how much Almighty God esteems the moral perfection of his creatures; that is, the implanting and confirming in their hearts a firm belief of what he reveals to them as his truth, a fear of offending him, a filial confidence in his goodness, and a sincere love and obedience to him as their supreme God and sovereign Lord; how much, I say, Almighty God esteems these things worthy of his procuring, even though by the temporary subversion, if I may say so, of the most constant laws of nature. Now, that these were the very ends which he had in view in working so many wonders among his people, is evident from his own repeated declarations, several of which are related above; to which I shall add the following, as being particularly expressive of this truth. It is taken from Deut. iv. where Moses, exhorting the people to love and serve their God, who had done such great things for them, speaks to them as follows: *Did ever people hear the voice of God speaking out of the midst of fire, as thou hast heard, and live? or hath God essayed to take him a nation from the midst of another nation by temptations, by SIGNS, and by WONDERS, and by war, and by a mighty hand; and by a stretched out arm, and by great terrors, according to all that the Lord your God did for you in Egypt before your eyes? Unto thee it was*  
*shewed,*

*shewed, that thou MIGHTEST KNOW THAT THE LORD HE IS GOD; THERE IS NONE ELSE BESIDE HIM—Know therefore this day, and consider it in thine heart, that the Lord he is God in heaven above, and upon the earth beneath; there is none else: thou shalt keep therefore his statutes and commandments, &c.* In consequence of this we find, that the people unanimously resolved to love and serve their God, who had done such great things for them; and after declaring their firm resolution of doing so, Almighty God, to show how ardently he desired this from them, and that he desired it with a view to their real and lasting happiness, expresses himself to Moses in this most tender and affectionate manner: *Oh that there were such a heart in them, that they would fear me and keep all my commandments always, that it might be well with them, and with their children for ever.* Dent. v. 29. In all which it manifestly appears what were the ends the divine wisdom had in view in the many and amazing miracles wrought among this people\*.

\* See also Deut. ix. x. xi. Psalm lxxviii. (alias lxxvii.) and Psalm cv. (alias civ.) through the whole, where the same truth is most beautifully declared.



THEY THAT WOULD KNOW THE  
LORD HE IS GOD; THERE IS NONE ELSE BESIDE

**CHAP. VI.**

*On other general Ends of MIRACLES, as discovered by REVELATION.*

**I.** **W**HAT we have seen in the preceding chapter puts it beyond all doubt to those who receive the scriptures as the word of God, that to procure credit to Almighty God with mankind, when he is pleased to reveal his will to them, and to excite in their minds and hearts those holy sentiments of faith, confidence, love, gratitude, obedience, and the like, in which the moral perfection of our souls properly consists, are ends truly worthy of God to procure by miracles, and are judged to be so by God himself, who has, in fact, frequently performed the most stupenduous miracles for that purpose. But as this is a subject of the greatest importance, I must pursue it a little further, and show from the same sacred records, some more of those general ends which God has been pleased to procure by the same means, and which either directly or indirectly conducted to the happiness and perfection sometimes of whole nations, and sometimes even of single persons only. And first, as we have seen in what manner he established religion among

among his people, let us go on to consider what he thought proper to do in order to preserve it.

II. Though the miraculous manner in which Almighty God was pleased to reveal and establish his religion, was fully sufficient to convince all then present that it was his work, as also all those who in after ages should believe its miraculous establishment upon the tradition and testimony by which it was to be handed down to them; yet, as the divine wisdom well knew the corruption of the heart of man, how impatient it is of restraint, how ready to shake off the yoke and grasp at every pretence of doing so, and consequently foresaw how apt men would be in after-ages to reject the belief of this first miraculous establishment of religion, if not supported by proofs that carry conviction along with them; so we find, in fact, that, in all succeeding ages when his religion was in any danger of being corrupted or destroyed, Almighty God was always ready to defend it by the same means by which he at first established it, and judged the preservation of it when in danger no less worthy his divine interposition by miracles, than he did its first establishment among his people.

III. Soon after the death of Joshua and of his contemporaries, who had been eye-witnesses of all the glorious things which Almighty God had done for that nation, the memory of these wonders began

began to wax weak among them, *the people served the Lord all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders that outlived Joshua, who had seen all the great works of the Lord that he did for Israel. And Joshua died, and also all that generation were gathered unto their fathers, and there arose another generation after them which knew not the Lord, nor yet the works which he had done for Israel.* Judges ii. In consequence of this, for a great number of years, *that is, during that whole period that Israel was governed by judges, they from time to time did evil in the sight of the Lord, and served Balaam, and they forsook the Lord God of their fathers, which brought them out of the land of Egypt, sometimes the whole nation together, sometimes a considerable part of it, and followed other Gods, and provoked the Lord to anger.* Ibid. In this dangerous state for religion, Almighty God was not wanting in defence of his own cause; nay, we may justly say, that he was working one continued miracle among them during all this period; *to wit, literally and daily fulfilling those prophecies which had been made long before by Moses.* This great man foresaw their future infidelity and foretold it to them, and at the same time declared to them what would be the consequences both of their fidelity and obedience to the Lord their God, and of their apostacy from his service. He assured them, that if they adhered to him and to his holy law, every kind of temporal blessing would be their portion; *If you walk in my statutes, says*  
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Almighty God to them by the mouth of this holy prophet, *and keep my commandments and do them, then I will give you rain in due season, and the land shall yield her increase—and I will give peace in the land, and you shall chase your enemies, and they shall fall before you by the sword—and I will walk among you, and I will be your God, and ye shall be my people. See the whole passage, Levit. xxvi. See also Deut. xxviii.* And, on the contrary, if they should forsake the Lord their God, abandon his service and prove disobedient to him, he assured them that all temporal evils would be sent upon them as the just punishment of their ingratitude;—*But if you will not hearken unto me, and will not do all these my commandments—I also will do this unto you, I will even appoint over you terror, consumption, and the burning ague—and I will set my face against you, and ye shall be slain before your enemies, and they that hate you shall reign over you, &c. Ibid.* Now, what is the whole history of the Judges but a literal verification of these prophecies? See the second chapter of that book, which in this respect is an abridgement of the whole: And as the accomplishment of prophecies, which had been predicted long before, is an undoubted proof that God is the author of them, (for prophecy is a miracle supereminently the work of God), nothing could contribute more feelingly to convince that people, that the religion they had received from their fathers was from God, than  
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that daily experience they had of the immediate consequences, which exactly followed as had been foretold, according as they either adhered to their religion and their God, or became disobedient to him.

IV. Neither were there wanting several particular miracles during this period, wrought either mediately or immediately for the same end, as when Deborah foretold the victory to be gained over Sisera, and the manner of his death; also Gideon's fleece, and the deliverance of the people from the captivity of the Madianites, by the miraculous victory he obtained over them; what happened at the birth of Sampson, his amazing strength, with that most extraordinary miracle of giving him abundance of water to quench his thirst out of the dry jaw-bone of an ass; Samuel's procuring thunder and lightning in an instant in a fine clear harvest day; all which shows how attentive Almighty God was to defend the purity and truth of his religion by miracles, from the dangers to which it was exposed during this period of the Judges. These now mentioned we shall have occasion to take notice of afterwards in a more particular manner: But there is also another famous passage of this period which deserves a little more attention here: Under the government of the high priest Eli, in punishment of the sins of his people, God permitted the ark of his covenant, which

which was the glory of their nation, to be taken from them and carried away by the Philistines. This was a subject of great triumph and exultation to these heathens, but of the utmost affliction and humiliation to the Israelites. But though Almighty God was pleased, by this means, to humble and punish his people for their sins, he did not fail to vindicate the honour of his religion, and to defend the ark, which was the most sacred testimony of his covenant with them, from the insults of his enemies, by repeated miracles wrought for this purpose; by means of which, these infidels were forced to acknowledge his power and authority both over them and over all their gods, and at last to restore the ark with honour to the people. When it fell into their hands, they placed it in the temple of Dagon their God: Next morning that idol was found lying flat upon the ground as it were in an act of adoration before the ark of the most high God: When raised up again by its votaries and put into its own place, the day after it was found not only fallen down as before, but even broken into different pieces upon the threshold; Almighty God disdaining to have an idol standing beside his ark, or placed upon an equal footing with it: He smote all the people of every city and its neighbourhood whither they carried the ark, with sore boils and shameful distempers, which carried them off in great numbers; so that the people of that city cried out, *The ark of the God of Israel*



*Israel shall not abide with us, for his hand is sore upon us, and upon Dagon our God;* and when, at last, forced by these chastisements, they resolved to send it home again to the Israelites, they put it to the test of a miracle to show whether what had happened to them was from God upon account of the ark, or if it was only an ordinary accident of life; and God was pleased to grant the very sign they demanded, to convince them that what had happened to them was from him in defence of his religion, and of the sanctity of that sacred deposit, which for his own just and wise ends he had permitted to fall into their hands.

V. During the reigns of Saul, David, and Solomon, there was no attempt made against religion, and accordingly we find no miracles wrought in these reigns directly in its defence. But after Solomon's death, when Jeroboam was made king of the ten tribes, and in a most ungrateful manner, through his false and worldly politics, endeavoured to carry off his people from the service of God and lead them to idolatry, immediately we find Almighty God rising up in defence of his religion, and asserting its truth against its enemies by miracles. After Jeroboam's defection, the first public solemnity that is mentioned of his idolatry was the time chosen by God to appear in his own cause; when a number of people were present, and the sacrilegious altar prepared, and the king ready to burn incense

incense upon it, a prophet sent by God stands forth, and prophesied against the altar in these words, *O altar, altar, says the Lord, behold a child shall be born unto the house of David, Josiah by name; and upon thee shall he offer the priests of the high places, that burn incense upon thee, and men's bones shall be burnt upon thee.* 1 Kings xiii. This prophecy we find literally accomplished many years afterwards. 2 Kings xxiii. 15. But that Jeroboam and all the people might know that it was a true prophecy, which should be fulfilled in its own time, another is made to be accomplished before their eyes, viz. that that very altar, against which the former prophecy was made, should all of a sudden be rent in two, and the ashes that were upon it be poured out upon the ground; this is given by the prophet as a sign to convince them of the truth of the former: But before this sign was accomplished, another miracle intervened to confirm it still further: The unhappy king, incensed at the prophet for what he had said, *put forth his hand from the altar, saying, lay hold on him; and his hand which he put forth against him dried up, so that he could not pull it in again to him;* and immediately the other sign was accomplished, *the altar also was rent, and the ashes poured out from the altar, according to the sign which the man of God had given by the word of the Lord:* Then the whole was compleated by another miracle; for the king, astonished at what had happened, *said to the man of God, intreat now*

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*the Lord thy God, and pray for me that my hand may be restored to me again; and the man of God besought the Lord, and the king's hand was restored and became as it was before. Ibid.* Now, what was the end for which all these miracles were wrought, but to convince the king and all the people of the greatness of their guilt, in leaving the religion of their fathers, and consequently to vindicate that true religion against all the endeavours of Jeroboam to destroy it?

VI. Some time after this, when a child of this same Jeroboam fell sick, being anxious about him, he desired his wife to disguise herself and go to the prophet Ahijah, who had formerly foretold him that he should be made king of the ten tribes, and enquire at him what would be the fate of the child. This prophet was now very old and had lost his sight; but before the queen's arrival, Almighty God discovered her coming to his servant, told him upon what errand she came, and what answer to give her. Accordingly, upon her entering the door of his house, he immediately addressed her by name, and reproaching her with her husband's perfidy and ingratitude to God, foretold her, that in punishment of his great sin, all his family should be cut off, and not so much as one soul should be left of his posterity, and that in process of time all his people whom he had seduced from their God, should be reduced to the great-

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est misery, overcome by their enemies, and carried away captives to a strange country; and as a sign of the truth of these prophecies, he declared to her, that as soon as she returned and set her foot within the city, her child should die; all which came to pass accordingly as foretold by this prophet. Here again we see miracles proper to God alone, viz. the foretelling things to come, both nigh at hand and in future ages, the first being given and verified as a proof of the certainty of the latter, till it also should be accomplished in its proper time; and all this to defend the true religion, and shew those who had abandoned it the enormity of their crime.

VII. The next public and violent attack upon religion was made by that impious prince Achab, who having married a heathen woman, was pushed on by her to the utmost extravagance, so as to murder all the prophets of God, and persecute his servants, in order thereby to destroy religion entirely, and force the people to idolatry. In this critical conjuncture the great Elijah, or Elias, was raised up by God as a bulwark to defend his truth, and put a stop to the torrent of impiety which was threatening to overflow the land. The first step the prophet took for this purpose was to inform the king before-hand, that *there should neither be dew nor rain upon the earth for these years but according to his word.* 1 Kings xvii. 1. thereby inti-

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mating, that God Almighty had, in a manner, put the rain and dew in his hands, that while he pleased none should fall, and at his desire it should be sent again upon the earth; and what he said was literally fulfilled; not a single drop fell for three years and a half, till the prophet, by his prayers, obtained it again. The consequences of this drought were dreadful; famine and misery destroyed the whole country, both man and beast. But what more convincing proof could be given the king of the evil of his ways, and of the truth of that holy religion which he was persecuting? And that this extraordinary power was given to Elias, and this severe scourge sent upon the people for this very end, to convince the king of his wickedness, the prophet expressly told him, when he said, *It is not I that have troubled Israel, but thou and thy father's house, in that ye have forsaken the commandment of the Lord, and followed Baalim.* 1 Kings xviii. 18.

VIII. The prophet finding that what he had said and done made little impression on the king, addresses himself to the people; and in order to convince them of the falsity of those pretended gods whom they had been induced by the king to adore, and that the God of their fathers was the only true God, he invites them to put the case to a fair trial, and offers, though single and alone, to sustain the cause of God against all the prophets of Baal, who

who were four hundred and fifty men. The method he proposed for deciding this grand question was equally plain to the meanest capacity, and convincingly decisive; it was to refer the case to their gods themselves, and leave it to them to defend their own cause by performing the miracle demanded for that purpose; he proposed that each side should prepare a sacrifice, and call upon their respective Gods, and the God that answered by fire should be esteemed the only true God. The proposal was accepted with universal applause, and the prophets of Baal durst not refuse the challenge; accordingly they first began, took a bullock, cut it in pieces, laid it on wood, but without any fire under it, and called upon their God Baal from morning till the time of the evening sacrifice, but there was neither voice, nor any to answer, nor any that regarded. 1 Kings xviii. 29.

Then Elijah in his turn built an altar to the Lord, and dug a large trench round about it, which he filled with water, that the miracle he was going to work might be the more glaring; then he put the wood in order, and laid the bullock on the wood, and made a short prayer to God, begging him to grant the miracle desired, *and let it be known*, says he, *this day, that thou art God in Israel, and that I am thy servant, and that I have done all these things at thy word—that this people may know that thou art the Lord God, and that thou hast turned their hearts back again.* Scarce had he finished this



prayer, when immediately *the fire of the Lord fell and consumed the burnt sacrifice, and the wood, and the stones, and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench.* Ibid. This was too glaring and convincing a proof not to have its desired effect; accordingly all the multitude of the people confounded and amazed, *fell on their faces, and they said, the Lord he is God, the Lord he is God.*

IX. It is scarce to be imagined but that this stupenduous miracle must have made some impression on the heart of Achiab; and in fact we find, that when Elijah, immediately after it, ordered all the prophets of Baal to be put to death as seducers of the people, the king made no objection. The goodness of God, desirous to improve these good seeds that were sown in the heart of Achab, was pleased soon after this to work some other miracles in his favours, but at the same time directly intended to prove that he was the only true God. The king of Syria wanting to pick a quarrel with Achab, sent some very insidious messages and haughty demands to him; which not being complied with, he raises a vast army, and comes to besiege Achab in Samaria; upon this a prophet comes to Achab from God with this message, *Hast thou seen all this great multitude? behold I will deliver it into thine hand this day, AND THOU SHALT KNOW THAT I AM THE LORD;* and that the hand of God might be the more manifest in this victory, it was to be gained only

only by two hundred and thirty-two men; which happened accordingly, and the enemy were slain with a very great slaughter. To wipe off this disgrace, the Syrians returned again next year in vast numbers (before whom the whole army of Israel was like two little flocks of kids), and vainly boasted that the Gods of the Israelites being Gods of the hills, were therefore stronger than they the preceding year; but now they would keep to the valleys, and would surely gain the victory. Here the honour of the true God was attacked by these infidels, and and therefore a prophet is sent to Achab with this message, *Thus sayeth the Lord, because the Syrians have said the Lord is God of the hills, but he is not God of the valleys, therefore I will deliver all this multitude into thine hand, and YE SHALL KNOW THAT I AM THE LORD.* 1 Kings xx. Achab accordingly gained a most complete victory, and humbled the Syrians exceedingly.

X. It is needless to make many reflections upon these plain facts; they speak for themselves, and are the most obvious and convincing proofs, that to preserve the true religion, which God has once established, is esteemed by him an object truly worthy his care; and that it is highly becoming his divine wisdom and goodness to perform the greatest miracles in its defence. Those miracles we have seen above were wrought directly for this purpose, and intended as proofs of the true religion; but there were

were many other miracles wrought by Elijah at the same time, which, though done upon other occasions, yet were most undoubted proofs of his being a servant of the true God; and that the religion he professed was true. But I must not omit another miracle wrought by this great prophet in foretelling the death of king Ahaziah, when he sent messengers in his sickness to inquire of *Baal-zebub the God of Ekron, whether he should recover of his disease.* 2 Kings. i. These messengers the prophet met, and, according to the instructions he had received from an angel, told them to go back to their master, and tell him in the name of the Lord, *Is it because there is not a God in Israel, that thou sendest to inquire of Baal-zebub the God of Ekron? therefore thou shalt not come down from that bed on which thou art gone up, but shalt surely die.* Ibid. v. 6. and soon after he died, according to the word of the Lord which Elijah had spoken. v. 17. where we see his death inflicted upon him foretold, and happening accordingly, in punishment of his impiety for neglecting the God of his fathers, and sending to enquire about his recovery at an idol; and consequently these also were miracles wrought in defence of the true religion.

XI. In the reigns of the succeeding kings, as the wickedness of the people of Israel was daily increasing, so we find God Almighty multiplying his miracles among them, particularly by the hands of



Elisha, the successor of Elijah, after this last was translated; we find also many particular prophecies made on different occasions, with their perfect accomplishments, especially that of the captivity and dispersion of the ten tribes, and the Babylonish captivity, and destruction of Jerusalem, which were expressly foretold as a punishment of the people's idolatry, and forsaking the true religion; and consequently, when literally fulfilled, were so many convincing proofs of its truth. All which shows how attentive Almighty God was, during this period of the kings, to work repeated miracles in defence of his true religion, and consequently how much he judges this an end worthy to be procured by such means. It is needless to multiply more examples in particular, as the above sufficiently evince this truth.

XII. During the time of the Babylonish captivity, religion was, in all human appearance, in the utmost danger; the people were dispersed amidst an infidel nation, were not allowed to be in a body by themselves, were deprived of the public exercises of their religion, and daily exposed to the dangerous example of those heathen nations among whom they dwelt. When we consider the inconceivable proneness which this people had to idolatry while in their own country, with all the helps of their religion, it seems next to a miracle that, in the above circumstances, they were not intirely perverted.

verted. But their very captivity itself, and the miseries they suffered in it, was one very powerful means to preserve them; for this was a convincing and experimental proof of the truth of their religion, as being a literal accomplishment of the many prophecies that had been made concerning it; neither was God wanting in working several particular and most astonishing miracles during this period, which not only confirmed his own people in their religion, but even forced their greatest enemies to acknowledge that their God was the only true God, the sovereign Lord of heaven and earth: witness the preservation of the three children in the fiery furnace, of Daniel in the lions' den, and his repeated interpretation of dreams, with the full accomplishment of these interpretations, of which more by and bye.

XIII. From the rebuilding of Jerusalem to the coming of our Saviour, we find the Jewish nation no less firmly attached to their religion than they had been prone, upon all occasions, to forsake it before that time. The repeated and fatal effects they had experienced of their former infidelity, and the numberless things Almighty God had done in proof of his truth, had at last overcome their obstinacy, and attached them most firmly to his service: and therefore we find, during this last period of their nation, that miracles wrought in proof of their religion became less frequent among them.

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Yet, even during this time, when the kings of Syria made some violent attacks upon religion, and several of the Jews themselves, blinded by their passions, joined the common enemy, and thereby increased the danger, we see Almighty God no less ready than in former ages to defend his truth, and work miracles for this purpose. The account of this persecution, and of the miracles which Almighty God wrought upon that occasion, is given at large in the books of the Maccabees, to which, for brevity's sake, I must refer; and from all that we have seen above in this present chapter, I must draw this clear and evident conclusion, that to preserve the true religion by miracles when it is in danger, is no less worthy of Almighty God, than to establish it at the beginning by the same means, and that this is the judgment God makes himself of this matter, having never failed, during the whole course of the Mosaic dispensation, actually to work very great and surprising miracles in defence of his religion, whenever it was exposed to any danger.

XIV. Next to the immediate defence of religion itself, there is nothing which Almighty God seems to have more at heart than that his people should preserve a high respect and religious veneration for all persons and things immediately connected with him, or employed in his service: hence he has always expressed the greatest jealousy for the honour of the sacred character and authority of the



the priesthood; for the respect due to those his holy servants whom he employed as his ambassadors to men; and for the reverence to be paid to all holy things used in his service, such as his ark, his temple, the sacred vessels, and the like: and indeed it must be owned, that as, where there is a true spirit of religion and piety towards God, this will of necessity show itself in a just respect and veneration for all those sacred persons and things which are so immediately connected with him; so, on the contrary, where this respect and veneration is wanting towards these sacred objects, it is a sure sign that virtue and piety are greatly upon the losing hand; and consequently that religion itself is in no small danger: For this reason Almighty God has judged this also an object worthy of his care to preserve, and has been pleased, through the whole series of the old religion, to work, as occasion required, most extraordinary and surprising miracles, in order to excite and keep up in his people a high esteem of the sanctity of the priesthood, and a just regard and veneration for all holy persons and holy things. And whereas the imprinting these sentiments of respect and veneration in the minds of the people seemed particularly needful at the first establishment of their religion, when their minds were as yet rude and gross, and unacquainted with the ways of God, so we find the infinite wisdom and goodness of God particularly lavish, if I may use the expression, at that time in  
working

working the most wonderful miracles for that purpose ; for, not to mention that all the glorious miracles wrought by Moses contributed exceedingly to imprint in the minds of the people the utmost veneration for his person, which was of the highest consequence at that time, let us only consider some of those which were wrought directly for these ends.

XV. Aaron and Miriam, the brother and sister of Moses, presumed upon a certain occasion to speak against him, and put themselves upon an equal footing with him ; but their presumption was immediately checked by a miracle ; Almighty God himself appeared in his glory on the tabernacle, reproved them by name for their crime, declared how much more highly favoured Moses was by him than they, and said, *wherefore then were ye not afraid to speak against my servant Moses ?* Num. xii. 8. Then departing from them in great wrath, he in an instant smote Miriam with an universal leprosy, from which she was not cured till after seven days, at the earnest prayer of Moses.

XVI. Soon after this Korah and his companions, full of jealousy and envy against Moses and Aaron, for the high dignity of the priesthood conferred on the latter and his family, rose up against them, accusing them of ambition and usurpation,

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and

and carried off a great number of the chiefs of the families to their party, of whom to the number of about two hundred and fifty men took upon them to provide censers and offer incense before the Lord. Moses was exceedingly afflicted at their crime, and dreading the fatal consequences it might draw upon them, exhorts them pressingly to return to their duty, and avert their impending ruin; but seeing their obstinacy, he foretells their destruction, as the most convincing proof of his being commissioned by God: *Hereby, says he, shall you know that the Lord hath sent me to do all these works, for I have not done them of my own mind. If these men die the common death of men, or if they be visited after the visitation of all men, then the Lord hath not sent me; but if the Lord make a new thing, and the earth open her mouth and swallow them up, and all that appertain unto them, and they go down quick unto the pit, then ye shall understand that these men have provoked the Lord.* Num. xvi. 28. Scarce had Moses finished these words, when lo! they are immediately accomplished: *And it came to pass, as he had made an end of speaking all these words, that the ground clave asunder that was under them, and the earth opened her mouth and swallowed them up, and their tents, and all the men that appertained unto Korah, and all their goods—and they went down alive into the pit, and the earth closed upon them, and they perished from among the congregation.* Verse 31. &c. And as for these two hundred and fifty



fifty principal men that had presumed to offer incense without being priests, *there came a fire out from the Lord and consumed them.* Verse 35. What an extraordinary interposition of the divine power is here displayed to our eyes! what surprising miracles! how fitly adapted to convince that rude and obdurate people of the sanctity of that authority which Moses and Aaron exercised, and to fill their minds with the most profound respect and veneration for the priesthood, which they saw ascertained by God himself by so glaring and so tremendous a vengeance exercised on those who profaned it! Such, however, was the obduracy of that people, that even these amazing miracles did not thoroughly settle them; but the more they go on to oppose the sacred authority which God had established among them, the more he goes on by miracles to confirm it. The very next morning, when the first impressions of fear and amazement had subsided, the people were vastly afflicted for the death of so many of the chiefs of their families, and looking on Moses and Aaron as the authors of that calamity, a general murmur rose against them throughout the whole congregation. Moses knew well that God would not let this pass unpunished; nay God himself threatened them with utter destruction upon that account, and accordingly a plague began. Moses ordered his brother to go immediately and offer an atonement for the people, which he did, and succeeded; God was

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appeased,

appeased, the plague was stopped; but, in the short time it lasted, no less than fourteen thousand of the people were consumed by it. What a dreadful instance of the divine vengeance! what a miraculous interposition of the divine power! how convincing a proof of the divine commission of Moses and the sanctity of the priesthood, their murmuring against which is immediately punished with a dreadful plague, which, at the prayer of the high-priest, is immediately stayed! But that these things might be fully established, and no more room left to call them in question again, Almighty God condescends to add another miracle to the former, which should be continued to after generations as a standing miracle among that people in proof of the above verities. He orders twelve rods to be provided, one for each of the tribes, with the name of each tribe written upon its rod, and Aaron's name upon the rod of Levi; these were ordered to be laid up in the tabernacle before the ark, and the point in question, *viz.* whether or not God Almighty had chosen Aaron and his family to be his priests, or if they had usurped that high dignity of themselves, was put to this miraculous proof, as God himself proposed it to Moses beforehand, *The man's rod whom I shall chuse shall blossom.* Num. xvii. 5. Nothing sure could be thought of more above all the powers of nature, than that a dry rod, without so much as being put into the earth, and that in the short space of one night, should

should send forth leaves and blossoms; and yet, the very next morning, when the rods were examined, *The rod of Aaron was budded, and brought forth buds, and bloomed blossoms, and yielded almonds!* Verse 8. Accordingly this was so convincing a proof that it intirely satisfied the people, and put a stop to the murmur; and the blossomed rod was ordered by God to be laid up in the ark of the testimony, as a token for all future ages of the authority and sanctity of the priesthood.

XVII. As we proceed in the history of God's people, we find repeated examples of the same conduct of the divine providence, *to wit*, most surprising miracles of different kinds performed by God in testimony of the sanctity of the priesthood and of holy things, and in order to create in the hearts of the people a high esteem and veneration for them. When under the command of Joshua they arrived at the river Jordan, which was the boundary of Canaan, the land of promise; it happened to be in the harvest time, when that river was greatly swelled and overflowed all its banks, so that there was no possibility for the people to pass thro' it. Almighty God was pleased to take this opportunity of working new miracles in favours of his people; in which he had several ends in view as related, Jos. iii. iv. One was to convince the people still more and more of the divine favour and protection, and consequently to increase their love



and confidence in God; thus Joshua said to the people, foretelling the miracle that was to be wrought in their favours, *hereby ye shall know that the living God is among you, and that he will without fail drive out the Canaanites.* Jos. iii. 10. See also c. iv. v. 24. Another end was to gain credit and authority to Joshua from the people, to convince them that God was with him, and consequently to engage them to a perfect submission and obedience to him; thus Almighty God himself says to him, *This day will I begin to magnify thee in the sight of all Israel, that they may know that as I was with Moses, so I will be with thee.* Jos. iii. 7. See also chap. iv. ver. 14. Now the wonderful miracle which was wrought for this purpose, Joshua foretells the people in these words, *Behold the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth passeth over before you into Jordan—and it shall come to pass, as soon as the soles of the feet of the priests that bear the ark of the Lord, the Lord of all the earth, shall rest in the waters of Jordan, that the waters of Jordan shall be cut off from the waters that come down from above, and they shall stand upon an heap.* Jos. iii. 11, 13. And this was literally performed, as is related at large in the following verses, the waters below running down, and those above standing firm in a heap, leaving a passage for the whole people through the channel of the river on dry ground; *And the priests that bore the ark of the covenant of the Lord stood firm on dry ground in the midst*

midst of Jordan, and all the Israelites passed over on dry ground, until all the people passed clean over Jordan, v. 17. But when all were passed over, the priests were then ordered to come out of the river; And it came to pass when the priests that bare the ark of the covenant of the Lord were come out of the midst of Jordan, and the soles of the priests feet were lifted up unto the dry land, that the waters of Jordan returned into their place, and flowed over all his banks as they did before. Jos. iv. 18. Now, in this wonderful miracle, which was a renewing of what had been done in the preceding generation by dividing the Red-sea, Jos. iv. 23. besides the two ends to be gained by it mentioned above, what respect, esteem and veneration must it have excited in the hearts of the people towards the priests and the ark of the covenant, who were the immediate instruments by which this miracle was performed, and to whom in a particular manner it is attributed? As soon, says Joshua, as the soles of the feet of the priests that bare the ark shall rest in the waters—the waters shall be cut off, which was accordingly done; and as long as they stood in Jordan, the division of the water continued; and the moment their feet was out of Jordan, its waters returned to their place as before. Could any thing serve more to exalt them in the sight of the people? could any thing more effectually convince that people of the sanctity of the priesthood, and of the respect due to the ark?

XVIII. To

XVIII. To create and keep up this respect for holy things, Almighty God had prohibited all but the priests, even the Levites themselves, from touching the ark, or looking into the Holy of Holies: Thus, when the different offices were appointed for the families of the Levites, and the sons of Kohath were ordered to be the bearers of the sanctuary, and the altars, and the holy vessels, and other instruments used at the altar, the priests, the sons of Aaron, were expressly commanded to cover up all these things, before the others came to carry them, who were forbidden under pain of death to touch them, or even so much as to see them uncovered. Thus, after having given orders to the priests in what manner every thing was to be covered up, the scripture says, *after that, the sons of Kohath shall come to bear it, but they shall not touch any holy thing lest they die.* Num. iv. 15. And a little after, *but they* (viz. the sons of Kohath) *shall not go in to see when the holy things are covered, lest they die.* Ver. 20. Now as this law was evidently made on purpose to excite in the hearts of the people a just respect and veneration towards all holy things belonging to the service of God, so we find that in after-ages those who transgressed this law, and failed in the due respect which it prescribed towards those holy things, were most severely and often miraculously punished for so doing. Besides what happened to the Philistines while the ark of God was in their possession,



cession, as above related, when they sent it back to the Israelites, its first arrival was among the Bethsamites; these were filled with great joy on seeing the ark return again; but, amidst their joy upon that occasion, had the curiosity and presumption to open it and look into it. This crime was so displeasing to God, that he immediately *smote them with a very great slaughter*, to no less a number than *fifty thousand, three-score and ten men.* 1 Sam. vi. 19. In like manner, when David was bringing up the ark to the place which he had prepared for it, in a great procession, and with very great solemnity, the oxen which drew the carriage on which the ark was placed became unruly, and kicked so that it was in danger of being overthrown; upon this *Uzzah*, one of those who drove the carriage, *put forth his hand to the ark of God and took hold of it, for the oxen shook it; and the anger of the Lord was kindled against Uzzah, and God smote him there for his error, and there he died by the ark of God.* 2 Sam. vi. What an impression must this have made in the hearts of all that people? what an idea must it have given them of the sanctity of God, and of every thing belonging to his service? what sentiments of reverence and veneration must it have excited in their minds towards these holy things? David himself was so deeply affected with fear and dread on this awful occasion, that he durst not venture to take the ark to himself, as he had proposed, seeing the great  
respect

respect which God required to be paid towards it. Another miraculous instance of the like nature in vindication of the respect due to holy things against those who profane them, we have in Balthazar, king of Babylon, who, in the midst of his banquet, ordered the holy vessels, which his father had carried away from the temple of Jerusalem, to be brought, that he and his concubines and nobles might drink out of them. This profanation of these holy vessels did not pass long unpunished. A man's hand appears to the king, writing upon the wall over against him; he is immediately seized with an excessive fear at this miraculous sight; Daniel the prophet is called in to read and explain the writing, and he assures the king that his ruin is at hand in punishment of his sacrilege; and that this miraculous hand-writing was sent by God to foretell his impending destruction on that account: and that very night the prediction was fully accomplished. Dan. v. From these examples, and other such recorded in the scriptures, we clearly see how much Almighty God esteems the exciting and preserving in the hearts of his people a respect and veneration for the priesthood, and for all holy things, to be an end worthy of his procuring even by miraculous exertions of his almighty power: But of this we shall have occasion to say more when we come to consider the instruments used by God in performing miracles; and shall here only add a few examples of miracles wrought to convince mankind

kind of the sanctity of holy people, though not priests, and to procure credit and authority to them and to their words with the people, when God Almighty is pleased to commission them to declare his will to others. We have seen this in part already, both with regard to Moses and Joshua; we have another most amazing instance of it with regard to this last, when after gaining a great victory over the combined army of five kings, Almighty God not only assisted his people in a miraculous manner to discomfit their enemies, by *casting down great stones from heaven upon them* to destroy them, but also, as the day was far spent, and time failed the Israelites for the pursuit, Joshua, full of a perfect confidence, *spoke to the Lord—and said in the sight of Israel, sun, stand thou still upon Gibeon, and thou, moon, in the valley of Ajalon. And the sun stood still, and the moon stayed, until the people had avenged themselves upon their enemies—so the sun stood still in the midst of heaven, and hastened not to go down about a whole day. And there was no day like that, before it nor after it, that the Lord hearkened unto the voice of a man.* Jos. x. 10. &c. What idea, what respect and veneration must that people have had for a man, at whose desire the great God was pleased to stop the general course of nature, and suspend for a whole day the laws of the universe? what opinion must they have had of his sanctity and interest with God, who was  
pleased



pleased in so amazing a manner to *hearken to his voice?*

XIX. Again, when the people of Israel became tired of being governed by judges, and demanded a king to reign over them, the holy prophet Samuel was exceedingly afflicted, and looked upon their demand as a throwing off God himself, and a withdrawing themselves from his authority; however, being instructed by God concerning this matter, he provided them a king of God's own chusing, and the day this king was presented to them, before Samuel gave up his own charge intirely, he expostulates with them upon their ingratitude towards God, shows his infinite goodness in condescending to their desire, and providing a king for them, and then promises on the part of God, that notwithstanding this their sin in seeking a king, yet if they will only in time-coming *fear the Lord, and serve him, and obey his voice*, all would yet be well with them; but *if they did not obey his voice, but rebelled against his commandment, that then the hand of the Lord would be against them, as it had been against their fathers*: And immediately, to confirm his words, and convince the people of the greatness of their crime, and that what he had said was really from God himself, he works a most extraordinary miracle, which he even foretells before-hand, *Is it not wheat harvest, says he, to-day? that is, a clear fine harvest day; I will call upon the*

*the Lord, and he shall send thunder and rain, that ye may perceive and see that your wickedness is great which ye have done in the sight of the Lord in asking you a king; so Samuel called unto the Lord, and the Lord sent thunder and rain that day; and all the people greatly feared the Lord and Samuel; and all the people said unto Samuel, pray for thy servants unto the Lord thy God that we die not, &c. 1 Sam. xii. Here we see this most extraordinary miracle performed on purpose to convince the people of what the prophet told them, which it not only did most effectually, but also increased their veneration and respect for the holy servant of God, convinced them of his power and interest with God, so that they greatly feared him, and earnestly recommended themselves to his prayers.*

XX. In like manner, when King Ahaziah in his sickness sent messengers to Baal-zebub the God of Ekron to inquire if he would recover his health, Elijah meeting the messengers by the way, sent them back to tell the king he would surely die of that distemper, because forsaking the God of Israel he had sent to inquire at an idol; upon which the king sent a captain and fifty men to bring the prophet prisoner to him. When the captain and his men arrived at the prophet, he accosted him with an air of authority, *thou man of God, the king hath said, come down;* to which the prophet immediately replied, *if I be a man of God, then let fire*

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*come*

come down from heaven, and consume thee and thy fifty, and immediately there came down fire from heaven, and consumed him and his fifty. 2 Kings i.

Upon this the king sent another captain with his company upon the same errand, and the same thing was repeated with him also. Here then a very great miracle is performed; fire comes down from heaven in an instant, at the voice of a man, once and again, and destroys a hundred people, on purpose to prove the sanctity of Elias, and that he truly was a man of God. In the same manner, when he raised the widow's son from the dead, and delivered him safe into his mother's hands, the natural and immediate effect it produced in her was, to convince her of the sanctity of the prophet; for, receiving her son alive from his hand, in a transport of joy and admiration she said, *now by this I know that thou art a man of God, and that the word of the Lord in thy mouth is true.* 1 Kings xvii. 24.

XXI. Again, when Elisha returned from accompanying his master Elijah when he was taken up to heaven, arriving at Jordan, and having the mantle of Elijah in his possession, which he had dropped at parting with him, in order to get a passage through the river, *he took the mantle of Elijah that fell from him, and smote the waters, and said, where is the God of Elijah? and when he also had smitten the waters, they parted hither and thither,*



mer, and he also went over. 2 Kings ii. 14. Nothing could give this prophet a greater idea of the sanctity of his master, than to see that the elements were not only obedient to himself in person, but even to the touching them with the mantle that had once belonged to him, and calling upon God for his sake; but the seeing this last miracle no less effectually convinced the sons of the prophets, who were spectators of it, that Elisha himself was a holy servant of God, and succeeded as prophet in room of his master who was gone; for, *when the sons of the prophets, who were to view at Jericho, saw him, they said, The spirit of Elijah doth rest on Elisha, and they came to meet him, and bowed themselves to the ground before him.* Ibid. v. 15. It were endless to mention every example of this kind; the above are more than sufficient to show what is here intended; and indeed the convincing mankind of the sanctity of God's holy servants, and procuring credit and respect for them, is a natural consequence that may be expected from all miracles wrought by them; but the above examples clearly show, that it is one of those ends which Almighty God sometimes directly intends from them.

XXII. Another end which we find the divine wisdom had in view by working miracles was, to convince idolaters that he was the only true God of all the earth, when at any time he wanted

to make known and propagate his true religion among them, or to punish them for their impieties and blasphemies against it. Thus, when Naaman the Syrian was so miraculously cured of his leprosy by washing himself seven times in Jordan, as the prophet Elisha had desired him, *he returned to the man of God, he and all his company, and came and stood before him, and he said, behold now I know that there is no God in all the earth but in Israel.* 2 Kings v. 15. We see here the happy effect which this miracle had, and which therefore was surely intended by the great God that wrought it, in convincing Naaman of the falsity of the superstition in which he had been brought up, and bringing him to the knowledge and service of the only true God: On the other hand, the glorious deliverance of good king Hezekiah from the impious Sennacherib, was foretold and executed in a most miraculous manner, on purpose to punish that prince for his haughtiness and impious blasphemies against the true God, and to convince him and all his host that the God of Israel, whom he had blasphemed, was the sovereign Lord of all the earth, and that all the power and strength he had in his numerous armies were wholly in the hands of this Supreme Being, and a mere nothing before him. See the whole history, 2 Kings xvii. xix. and Isaiah xxxvi. xxxvii.

XXIII. It is commonly observed as a most admirable instance of the divine providence, and of God's wonderful manner of disposing all things well for his wise and beneficent ends, that whilst, by the dispersion of the ten tribes, and the captivity of the Jews in Babylon, he justly punished his people for their repeated crimes, and frequent rebellions against him, he, at the same time, made use of this as a most proper means to bring these other nations acquainted with him, and with his religion, and with the sacred books, and thus dispose them for the more effectually receiving, in process of time, the Redeemer and his doctrine, when he should afterwards be sent among mankind; and to do this the more effectually, we find he was not wanting in working most glorious miracles during the Babylonish captivity, which extorted, even from his most inveterate enemies, a noble confession of his almighty power, and that he was the only King and sovereign Lord of all the earth. The impious and haughty Nebuchadnezzar, seeing the firm resolution of the three holy young men in refusing to comply with his idolatry, and to worship the golden statue that he had set up, was filled with indignation against them, and in his fury expressed his pride and arrogance in this blasphemous manner, *Who is that God that shall deliver you out of my hands?* but when afterwards he saw them walking loose in the midst of the fiery furnace, confounded and amazed he called



called them out, acknowledged them for servants of the most high God, and broke out into this glorious attestation of his divinity, *Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Mesach, and Abed-nego, who has sent his angel and delivered his servants that trusted in him—therefore I make a decree, that every people, nation, and language, which speak any thing amiss against the God of Shadrach, Mesach, and Abed-nego, shall be cut in pieces, and their houses made a dung-hill, BECAUSE THERE IS NO OTHER GOD THAT CAN DELIVER AFTER THIS SORT. See Daniel iii. 28, 29.* Again, when the prophet Daniel had discovered to the king his dream, which he had quite forgot, and which none of the wise men among the Chaldeans could find out; and when he showed him also the meaning and interpretation of it, the king was so amazed at the greatness of this miracle, which so convincingly demonstrated that the God of Daniel was the true God, and that Daniel was in the highest favour with him, that *he fell on his face and worshipped Daniel, and commanded that they should offer an oblation and sweet odours to him; and the king answered unto Daniel and said, of a truth it is that your God is a God of Gods, and a Lord of Kings, and a Revealer of secrets, seeing thou couldest reveal this secret. Dan. ii. 46, 47.* Another example to the same purpose we have in the preservation of Daniel in the lion's den, which made such an impression on Darius, another heathen and idolatrous prince, that he wrote

wrote to all his subjects as follows: *Peace be multiplied unto you: I make a decree, that in every dominion of my kingdom, men tremble and fear before the God of Daniel, for he is the living God and stedfast for ever, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed, and his dominion shall be even unto the end. He delivereth and rescueth, and worketh signs and wonders in heaven, and in earth, who hath delivered Daniel from the power of the lions. Dan. vi.* These examples need no application.

XXIV. I shall now sum up in short what is the necessary result of all that we have seen in this and the preceding chapter, that it may appear at once in a more clear and distinct point of view. We find, then, from undoubted facts related in the sacred word of God itself, that God has been pleased to work numbers of great and astonishing miracles at different times and in different places, for the following purposes: *1mo*, For convincing mankind that the doctrine he revealed to them by those who wrought these miracles in his name, was truly his doctrine, and thereby to engage them the more readily to receive, and the more stedfastly to embrace it. *2do*, For defending his revelation once made, and preserving the religion he had given his people, from all attempts in after-ages to corrupt or destroy it. *3tio*, For asserting his own honour against all false gods, and their idolatrous worship. *4to*, For engaging his people to believe and trust in him,

him, to love him, to obey him, and to serve him only, and thus to promote the sanctification and perfection of their souls. 5<sup>to</sup>, To assert and vindicate the sanctity of his priesthood, and of all those holy things made use of in his immediate worship, and to procure due respect and veneration to be paid to them. 6<sup>to</sup>, To show the sanctity of those holy people whom he sends from time to time into the world, as his messengers among men, and to gain due respect and credit to them, that by their words and examples others may be stirred up to greater piety and fervour. 7<sup>mo</sup>, To convince idolaters and those who knew him not, that he is the only true God, when at any time he is pleased to communicate the knowledge of himself and of his holy will to them. And from all this we draw this obvious and natural conclusion: "That since Almighty God has been pleased to work the most stupenduous miracles for gaining these ends, it was most worthy of him to do so; and as it was so then, it is no less so now, and at all times, whenever the like ends may require it."

## CHAP.



## C H A P. VII.

*On the Particular Ends of MIRACLES known  
from REVELATION.*

I. **W**HEN we consider the importance of those general ends of miracles related in the two preceding chapters, wherein the glory of the supreme Being, and the sanctification and happiness of whole nations, were so nearly concerned, we are not surpris'd that a God of infinite goodness should condescend to exert his almighty power in working miracles, when ends so worthy of himself are to be obtained by them; but it may appear somewhat wonderful, indeed, if we find that this same great God has been no less liberal in performing the most amazing miracles, even when the sanctification and happiness of particular persons only were immediately intended to be obtained by their means. And, indeed, it is from this head of the supposed disproportion between the end propos'd and the miracle performed, as if the former were not worth the *expence* of the latter, that Freethinkers draw great part of their sneers and objections against the existence of particular miracles. Their mistake rises from their ignorance  
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of, or inattention to three very important truths, and evidently shows how superficial they are in their inquiries about these matters, notwithstanding the air of authority and self-sufficiency with which they dogmatize concerning them. These truths I shall here display, as they serve for so many principles which very much illustrate this subject of the *Ends of Miracles*, and at once enervate all objections against their existence, drawn from the pretended insignificance of these ends.

II. *First*, The intrinsic value of one single soul is greatly superior, and much more esteemed by Almighty God, than all the inanimate creation together. This is a truth which we have seen above, in a great measure, proved by the help of natural reason; but it is revelation only which can set it in its proper light; as he who made the soul, and therefore perfectly well knows its real value, is the only one who can discover that value to us, and give us a just and proper idea of it. And indeed it must be owned, that the idea which Almighty God gives us in his holy scriptures of the high value and intrinsic worth of a rational soul, is exceedingly sublime and noble. He assures us, in the first place, that, with regard to ourselves and our own interest, the whole world is not equal, nor comparable to one soul: *What will it profit a man, says Jesus Christ, to gain THE WHOLE WORLD and lose his own soul? or what will a man give in*

*exchange*

exchange for his soul? Matth. xvi. Alas! the world is but a momentary shadow, which must end with time, but the soul will subsist for ever and ever! and consequently there is as great an odds between the value of the whole world and that of a soul, as there is between time and eternity. Secondly, the scripture informs us, that the devil himself, who is termed in holy writ *the god of this world*, and *the ruler of the powers of darkness*, puts such an immense value upon souls, that his continual employment is to go about like a roaring lion seeking to get them to himself, and that he is willing to give all the treasures of this world for a single act of worship from one soul; for, when our blessed Saviour was pleased to submit to the humiliation of being tempted by Satan, after other means had failed him, that wicked spirit at last takes him up to an exceeding high mountain, and there *shewed unto him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time*; and the devil said unto him, *all this power will I give thee, and the glory of them, for that is delivered unto me, and to whomsoever I will I give it; if thou, therefore, wilt worship me, all shall be thine*. Luke iv. What an idea does this give us of the high value and worth of a soul above all the material world, when we see this wicked spirit, who surely knows the value of both, give so great a preference to the former? But even this is little, or rather nothing at all, when compared to the esteem which Almighty God himself has shown for the



the soul of man, in sending his own only son, equal to himself in nature, to redeem man from misery, at no less a price than the last drop of his precious blood, spilt in the midst of the most dreadful torments! When we consider the infinite dignity of the person of Jesus Christ, his perfect innocence and sanctity, and the inestimable value of his precious life, it cannot fail to give us the most exalted idea of the value and worth of the human soul; when we see that glorious Being debasing his dignity by the most abject humiliations, concealing his sanctity and innocence under the outward appearance of a sinner, and laying down his precious life, in the midst of torments, for no other end but to save our souls, and redeem us from that interminable misery which we had deserved for our sins. What shall I say of that anxiety and sollicitude which Almighty God every where expresses throughout his holy scriptures for our happiness? his pressing concern for our good? his ardent desire for our salvation? all which are most endearing proofs of the high value and esteem which he sets upon the soul of man \*. If, therefore, in the judgment of, Jesus Christ

\* The following beautiful lines of Dr Young, in his Night Thoughts, are very much to our purpose here:

Know'st thou th' importance of a soul immortal?  
Behold this midnight glory, worlds on worlds!  
Amazing pomp! redouble this amaze;  
Ten thousand add; add twice ten thousand more;  
Then weigh the whole; ONE SOUL outweighs THEM ALL,  
And calls th' astonishing magnificence  
Of unintelligent creation poor. *Complaint, Night VII.*

Christ himself, the whole world is not to be compared to one soul, can we be surpris'd that Almighty God should cause any change or alteration in the ordinary course of the inferior creation, when the perfection and happiness of so valuable a being as a soul is, can by that means be promoted? If he sets so high a value on the soul of man as to lay down his own most precious life to redeem him, can we wonder that he should suspend for a time the laws by which inanimate matter is guided, or cause any unusual change or alteration in it, in order to secure the salvation of a soul which cost him so dear? To bring about this great end of the redemption of mankind, *he spoke much, and did more, and suffered most of all*, as a certain holy man observes; but to perform the most stupenduous miracle, he has only to will it, and immediately his will is obeyed: if, then, he has actually done the greater to gain souls, can we be surpris'd he should do the less? And is it not most worthy of him to do what costs him only to will it, in order to secure an end for which he has already done and suffered so much, even a cruel and ignominious death? If Deists and Free-thinkers would consider these things attentively instead of ridiculing miracles, because they, forsooth, can see no great and general good end procured by them, they would easily be convinced that it is most worthy and highly becoming the majesty of God to perform even the most astonishing miracles,

to suspend the whole order, and all the laws of nature, when the perfection or happiness of one single soul can be the better secured by so doing.

*Secondly,* Another great cause of their mistaken judgment in this matter is their ignorance of, or not adverting to two different ends which the divine wisdom has in view in working miracles, *viz.* the general or universal ends which are common to all miracles, and the particular and inferior ends which are different in different miracles. The general and universal ends which God has ultimately and principally in view in every miracle, and indeed in all his works, as we have seen above, are, first his own glory, and then the salvation of souls. The former of these is always the constant and unavoidable consequence of a true miracle, because every true miracle necessarily manifests to the world the power, wisdom, goodness, or justice of God; it also conduces to, and promotes the perfection and salvation of souls, by exciting in the hearts of all those who see it, or afterwards come to the knowledge of it, those holy sentiments of gratitude, and love, and confidence in the divine goodness, or a salutary fear of his judgments. The particular and inferior ends of miracles, are those good and wholesome effects which are more immediately intended, and directly produced by them, either for the benefit or punishment of those concerned, which are different on different occasions, but



but always conducive to the above general ends, and subservient thereto; such as the bestowing temporal favours, or the inflicting temporal evils in a miraculous manner. Of these the former naturally and powerfully excite the most grateful sentiments of love, confidence, praise, thanksgiving, and other such holy virtues, in the hearts both of those who see or know of such miracles, and especially of those who reap the gracious and beneficent effects of them, towards the kind and paternal hand that bestows them; and the latter no less powerfully tend to rouse sinners from their lethargy, and move them to repentance, and to fill all those who see or hear of them with a salutary fear of the divine justice, and a dread of offending their great Creator. Now, should any miracle be performed for the immediate behoof of a single person only, and seem directly to tend to his good alone; yet, if this comes to be known to others, it becomes a more general good, and, if published to the world, becomes an universal benefit, capable of producing the best effects, by manifesting the glory of God, and promoting the good of souls, even to the latest posterity; witness all the miracles of this kind recorded either in holy writ, or in the genuine lives of the saints, which it is impossible to read, with a faithful heart, without being moved to sentiments of piety and devotion. Here, then, lies another great source of the mistaken judgments and false reasoning of Deists upon

this subject, their not attending to the different ends for which miracles are performed, and especially to those general and most valuable ends which are necessarily found in all true miracles, *to wit*, the displaying, in a most sensible and affecting manner, the perfections and glory of the supreme Being, and thereby efficaciously promoting the perfection of the soul of man. Instead of this they are perpetually grovelling about the immediate sensible effects produced by miracles; and because they do not always find in them some remarkable great end relating to present happiness, they therefore persuade themselves that what they see is unworthy of God, below the dignity of the divine majesty, by no means deserving the expence of a miracle, and therefore a just foundation for them to ridicule the miracle itself, and explode it as an imposture. The falsity of such reasoning is manifest from what is said above, and will appear still more when we come to the facts themselves.

*Thirdly*, Another great source of their mistake lies in confounding the idea and opinion which the Supreme Being has of miracles, with the ideas and opinions which they themselves, and indeed mankind in general, have of them. Miracles in the eyes of man are something exceeding great and wonderful, the effects of a power quite inconceivable to us, and they naturally fill our minds not only with wonder and amazement, but also either with joy and pleasure, or with fear and terror, ac-

According to the nature of the effect produced by them in regard to ourselves or others. Hence, in relation to our notions, a miracle is a laborious work, requiring a force quite superior to any thing we know; and the more uncommon or extraordinary the thing done is in our eyes, the greater effort of strength it seems to us to require: From this we distinguish greater and smaller miracles, according as they seem to require a greater or smaller exertion of power to effectuate them. But can any reasonable person allow himself to think that they appear in this light to Almighty God? how unreasonable would such a thought be? With regard to God, there is not the smallest odds between the greatest miracle in our eyes and the smallest; between annihilating a mite and annihilating the universe; between creating a grain of sand and creating a world. The one is as easy to him as the other; the sole act of his will equally suffices to perform them both. Nor is there any thing wonderful to him at all, because he perfectly well knows all that possibly can be done in creatures; and sees every thing that actually will be done in them to all eternity; hence nothing can possibly be new to him, nothing wonderful, nothing miraculous in his eyes; *the works of all flesh are before him, says the wise man, and there is nothing hidden from his eyes; he sees from eternity to eternity, and nothing is wonderful in his sight.* Eccles. xxxix. 24, 25. Now this great



truth the above named gentlemen seem intirely to forget, and argue as if they imagined that miracles made the same impression upon God that they do on man; that what we call a greater miracle costs him more than a small one; that therefore the one is more precious in his eyes than the other, and requires a proportionably more valuable end to be acquired, before he can be induced to perform it. And from these notions, which I don't suppose them capable of entertaining expressly, but which seem to lurk in their minds, and influence their judgments; from these, I say, they conclude, that when they hear of any miracle, but don't perceive any immediate end, which, according to their views, seems proportionate to it, the miracle must certainly be false, and immediately cry out with a sneer, "pugh! to what purpose so great an expence of miracle? will the all-wise God be at such pains for nothing? where is there any end here equal or proportionable to the thing done? for shame, to give credit to such unlikely tales as these!" and upon these *solid arguments*, without more ado, they resolve the whole into priestcraft and imposture. The injudicious folly of such reasoning is clearly manifest, both from the principles on which it is founded when examined explicitly, and from the many express facts declared in holy scripture, which I shall now proceed to relate; and from which it will appear, that Almighty God forms a very different judgment from these gentlemen

gentlemen in this matter, and has actually been pleased to perform great numbers of miracles for the benefit even of particular persons, and where the immediate end directly intended would seem, according to modern ideas, to be but of very little importance; but which, like others of the same kind, very much conduced to promote the great end of all miracles, and continue to this day to display the infinite goodness or justice of God, and to fill the hearts of all sincere Christians with the most amiable affections towards their great Creator. Now that we may, as much as possible, observe distinction and order in relating the miracles from scripture which fall under our present subject, we must divide them into different classes, according to the nature of the particular ends immediately and directly intended by them.

III. The first class contains all those cases where Almighty God communicating any truth, or giving any commission, or making any promise to any of his servants, was pleased to convince them by miracles, that these things were from him and not a delusion. We have seen above how he behaved in this respect to Moses, when he appeared to him in the wilderness in the burning bush, and gave him the commission of delivering his people out of Egypt; he was pleased to perform some very extraordinary miracles upon this occasion, by turning Moses's rod into a serpent, and making his  
hand

hand leprous; and then restoring both as they were before, for no other immediate end but to convince Moses that it was God himself who was giving him this commission, and to give him a confidence in the divine protection for enabling him to perform it with success; which effects they produced accordingly.

IV. Another beautiful example of this we have in the call of Gideon to be the deliverer of the people of God from the tyranny of the Midianites: After the angel had discoursed some time with him, and told him, that he should *save Israel from the hands of the Midianites*, and for this purpose encouraged him by the promise of his protection, *Surely I will be with thee, and thou shalt smite the Midianites as one man*; Gideon, dubious if this was really a messenger from heaven, asked a sign to convince him, *If now, says he, I have found grace in thy sight, then shew me a sign that thou talkest with me*: Then going into the house, he made ready the flesh of a kid, and brought it out, with some unleavened cakes and a measure of flour, and a pot full of broth, and presented the whole to the angel; the angel desired him to lay the whole upon the hard rock, and *pour out the broth, and he did so*; then the angel of the Lord put forth the end of the staff that was in his hand, and touched the flesh and the unleavened cakes, and *there arose up fire out of the rock, and consumed the*  
flesh



*flesh and the unleavened cakes; and the angel of the Lord departed out of his sight, Judges vi.* We see here a very great miracle, a flame of fire brought out of the hard rock in an instant by the touch of the angel's staff, and consuming all the offering, for no other immediate end but to give satisfaction to a single person, and to convince him that the commission he had received was from God himself. Were we to rest here only, our modern infidels might descant a great deal upon this fact, by vilifying the end obtained, by observing that the miracle was quite needless, that the end could have been obtained as well without it, as was done with several of the other judges, whom God raised up about this time to deliver his people, and encouraged them to undertake that work by the ordinary impressions he made in their minds without any miracle at all, &c. No question but God Almighty could have done this also in Gideon without a miracle, neither was he any ways obliged to do it by miracle; but here is a certain fact which shows he does not think it unworthy of himself to condescend to the desires of his servants, and to work miracles for giving satisfaction even to a single person, and for convincing him that it is he himself who is speaking with him. But we ought not to rest at this immediate end alone, but consider what impressions this miracle made in Gideon's mind, how it discovered to him the infinite goodness and condescension of Almighty God, how it filled him with

with a fear of his divine majesty, and with what superior confidence and courage it inspired him to undertake the great work to which God had called him. These were glorious ends, worthy of the Almighty to procure by repeated miracles if necessary; and, in fact, we find he did perform repeated miracles on this very occasion, the more effectually to procure them; for when Gideon some time after had gathered together his army to fight for his people, being desirous of further assurance from heaven, he said unto God: *If thou wilt save Israel by mine hand, as thou hast said, behold I will put a fleece of wool in the floor; and if the dew be on the fleece only, and it be dry upon all the earth beside, then shall I know that thou wilt save Israel by mine hand, as thou hast said. And it was so; for he rose up early in the morning, and thrust the fleece together, and wringed the dew out of the fleece, a bowl-full of water. And Gideon said unto God, let not thine anger be hot against me, and I will speak but this once: Let me prove, I pray thee; but this once with the fleece; let it now be dry only upon the fleece, and upon all the ground let there be dew. And God did so that night; for it was dry upon the fleece only, and there was dew on all the ground, Judges vi.* What a field for sneers and ridicule, according to the reasoning of these times, is here! how unworthy, would our modern Deists say, of the Almighty to be employed in such trifles? how far below the majesty of God to alter the ordinary course established.

established in nature for gratifying the idle desires of a person who ought rather to have been punished for his incredulity after what he had already seen! *I believe too much in God*, says Rousseau, *to credit so many miracles so little worthy of his nature.* But a pious soul would make a quite contrary conclusion, and would read, in these facts, the infinite goodness and condescension of God, his paternal indulgence towards his servants, his high esteem and value for any one soul, which he is ready to gratify even by working repeated miracles, if required or necessary; and from these considerations would be filled with the most tender sentiments of praise, thanksgiving, confidence, love, gratitude, and the like, towards such infinite goodness; and there is no reason to doubt but this was the effect produced in the mind of Gideon, and this effect it continues to produce to this day in the minds of all those pious souls, who, firmly believing all the sacred truths revealed by God, read his divine scriptures with humility and devotion. We have another example pretty similar to this in the behaviour of the angel that appeared to the parents of Sampson and foretold his birth, though his mother had been till that time barren; and when they were offering sacrifice to the Lord, *the angel did wondrously before them, and ascended up in the flame of the altar*, to convince them he was a messenger from God, and



and that what he had said was true. See Judges xiii.

V. The miracle which was performed by Ifaiah the prophet before king Hezekiah, deserves a particular place here. This good king had fallen sick and was threatened with death, but, upon his tears and prayers to God, God was pleased to recover him, and add fifteen years more to his life, and he sent the prophet Ifaiah to tell him so; and that in three days he should be so well as to be able to go to the house of God; but Hezekiah, anxious to have a proof of the truth of this prophecy, said unto Ifaiah, *what shall be the sign that the Lord will heal me, and that I shall go up into the house of the Lord the third day?* And Ifaiah said, *this sign shalt thou have of the Lord, that the Lord will do the thing that he hath spoken, shall the shadow go forward ten degrees, or go back ten degrees?* and Hezekiah answered, *it is a light thing for the shadow to go down ten degrees, nay, but let the shadow return backward ten degrees.* And Ifaiah the prophet cried unto the Lord, and he brought the shadow ten degrees backward, by which it had gone down in the dial of Achaz, 2 Kings xx. What a stupendous miracle are we presented with in this passage! the ordinary course of nature suspended! the diurnal \* motion of the heavens not only retarded

\* The intelligent reader will easily perceive, that I express myself here in the scripture style, which on this subject accommodates itself to the appearances these things make on the eyes of the beholders.

tarded or stopped, as was done when at Joshua's command the sun stood still, but absolutely reverted, and a motion diametrically opposite impressed upon them! and all this for what end? to satisfy a single person of the certainty of an event, which in the short space of three days he would have seen verified by the fact itself. Human reason is here lost in amazement, and infidelity would laugh at this relation, and reject it with disdain, from the palpable absurdity it seems to carry in its very bosom. "Can reason ever believe, will the deist say, that the supreme Being has nothing else to do but attend to the idle curiosity of such worms as we are? to gratify every foolish desire of man? much less to work miracles for such an end? But to suspend the universal laws of the whole creation, to alter the course of the heavens, to undo in a manner his own work, for gratifying the idle impatience of a single person, which the short space of three days would have satisfied in the natural course of things, without any miracle at all; how ridiculous to believe such a tale so unworthy of God! what proportion is there between the superlative greatness of the miracle here said to be wrought and the end gained by it? does the Almighty do any thing without some end worthy of himself, and worthy of the means he uses? and do we see any such end here, &c." Such are the impious arguments which are daily used in similar

cases not only by Deists, but sometimes even by such as call themselves Christians. It is indeed curious enough to observe their unreasonable conduct; if the miracle recorded be in their eyes small or trifling in itself, they reject it upon this very account, "it is unworthy of God to be employed in such trifles." If the miracle be great and stupenduous, and which evidently none but God can perform, then, "It is ridiculous, say they, to suppose that God would do such things without some great end proportionated to the greatness of the means he uses." It is easy, however, to see the cause of their mistake from the principles laid down in the beginning of this chapter; for, with regard to the end, they consider only the immediate secondary effect directly produced, which we may easily allow is not always proportionated to the working of a miracle, but they don't reflect how much the miracle wrought for such an immediate end tends farther to manifest the divine perfections, and his esteem and love for the soul of man, and to excite in the hearts of those who see it the most excellent and amiable affections towards such infinite goodness; and these, which are the natural consequences of all miracles, are ends, which, as we have seen above, are worthy of any miracle God can work in the material creation, whether great or small. Now, who can doubt but these ends were exceedingly promoted by that most stupenduous miracle above-related?

Nay,



Nay, who is there to this day that reads the account given us of it in the holy scripture with a faithful and pious heart, and does not feel himself penetrated with the most ardent affections of admiration, reverence, piety, and love? For these effects were not confined to Hezekiah and Isaiah alone, or any others then present when the miracle was performed, but the fact being recorded in holy writ, its effects have continued to be produced by it in numbers of souls to this day, and will never cease to be produced by it in numbers more as long as the world endureth. Now, will the infidels say that these are not effects worthy of God, to be procured even by the greatest miracle? Again, with regard to the thing done, their mistake lies in this, that they don't consider that, whether the miracle be great or small, stupenduous or less amazing, it is all the same to God, the one is as easy to him as the other; he needs only to will, and what he wills is immediately performed; but that the more extraordinary the miracle is, the more effectually does it promote the great and ultimate ends of all miracles, the glory of God and the good of souls.—I might mention here more examples belonging to this class, such as Zacharias' being struck dumb, as a proof of the truth of what the angel Gabriel declared to him concerning the birth of his son St John the Baptist, and others such;

such ; but what is above is fully sufficient for our purpose.

VI. In the second class, I shall relate those cases wherein we find Almighty God condescending to work miracles in favours of particular persons as a reward of their virtues, particularly their acts of charity, their confidence in his goodness, and constancy in his service. When Elijah the prophet was forced to leave his retreat in the wilderness, Almighty God ordered him to go to Zarephath, where he had commanded a widow woman to feed him. This poor woman was reduced to a handful of meal, and a little oil in a cruise, between her son and herself, by the long continuance of the famine, and was just going to gather a few sticks for fire to make the last cake for herself and son, and then give themselves up to death, when the prophet met her, and desired her to bring him a little water, and bake a cake first for him, and then for herself and son : Considering the condition she was in, this was to be sure a very hard demand, and a severe trial of her charity ; it is true, indeed, when the prophet asked this of her, he at the same time foretold her in the name of God, that *her meal should not waste, nor her oil fail, till such time as the Lord sent rain upon the earth* ; but he was a stranger to her, nay, she was a heathen woman of Sidon, not belonging to the people of Israel ; she did not know him then to be a prophet,

and

and any impostor might have said the same thing to gain his end : Nevertheless, the poor woman seeing him a stranger, and in distress, did as he desired, and first made a cake for him : In reward of her charity, God Almighty wrought that great miracle of multiplying her handful of meal and her cruise of oil to such a degree, *that she and he (Elijah), and her house did eat many days, and the barrel of meal wasted not, neither did the cruise of oil fail, according to the word of the Lord which he spake by Elijah, 1 Kings xvii.* Here we have a most amazing miracle performed by Almighty God, the immediate and direct end of which was the rewarding an act of charity, and the supplying the wants of his prophet who trusted in him. I don't know whether our modern freethinkers would in their great wisdom deem this an end worthy of so great a miracle, but we see Almighty God did so, and performed it for this very purpose : But if they should chance to differ in opinion upon this point from the God that made them, let them not be so rash as to reject the belief of this miracle upon this ground, that they see no worthy end to be gained by it ; but reflect that the end above-mentioned, which they judge unworthy, was only the immediate inferior and particular end ; but that the ultimate end of all miracles, the manifesting the glory of God, and the procuring the perfection of souls, were most admirably promoted by this glorious miracle ; consider only what an effect it must have had



in the heart of the prophet himself, and of the poor widow, and of all her family; and we have seen that the advancing the perfection of one soul is an object worthy of the highest miracle: Neither were these valuable effects of it confined to that family alone; by recording it in holy writ, it continues to produce the same in all believers, and to be a most admirable incentive to the practice of these holy virtues of hospitality and charity, so amiable in the eyes of God, and so profitable to those who practise them. But the goodness of God did not stop here; it happened, some time after, that the widow's son took sickness and died, and the poor afflicted mother had recourse to the prophet in her distress; he, full of compassion and gratitude, carried the dead child up to the loft where he lay, and prayed to God to restore the child to life; and observe the argument he used to induce God to grant his petition, *O Lord God, says he, hast thou also brought evil upon the widow with whom I sojourn, by slaying her son? Mark with whom I sojourn, the person who has been so hospitable, so charitable to me; this was too strong a motive not to influence the bowels of mercy of our God to yield; and therefore, upon the prophet's praying that his soul might return again, The Lord heard the voice of Elijah, and the soul of the child came unto him again, and he revived—and he delivered him alive unto his mother,* 1 Kings xvii. This also shows beyond reply, that Almighty God esteems it worthy of himself to perform

form the greatest miracles as a reward for the virtues and charitable actions of his servants.

VII. Another beautiful example of this we have in what the prophet Elisha did for the Shunamite woman, his hospitable landlady: This good woman, seeing the prophet often pass by that way, *constrained him to turn in to her house, and eat bread*; and conceiving a great opinion of him as a man of God, *she said unto her husband, behold now I perceive that this is a holy man of God that passes by us continually, let us make a little chamber I pray thee on the wall, and let us set for him there a bed, and a table, and a stool, and a candlestick; and it shall be when he cometh to us, that he shall turn in thither*, 2 Kings iv. This is the description the scripture gives us of the hospitality and charity of this good woman, and of her regard for those whom she believed to be servants of God. The prophet was not insensible of her kindness, and desiring to show himself grateful, called upon her to ask what he could do for her in return for the attention she had shown to him; and understanding by his servant, that though she was a woman of condition, and well to live, yet she had no child, and her husband was an old man, he immediately prophesied to her that within a year she should have a son, which was fulfilled accordingly, *for the woman conceived and bare a son at that season that Elisha had said unto her*, ver. 17. and thus the blessing, which of all others her heart most desired,

fired, was bestowed upon her in a most miraculous manner, in reward of her hospitality and charity to God's servant. Neither did the goodness of God rest here in his liberality towards her ; this very child, being grown up, was taken sick and died, and at the prayers of the prophet was miraculously restored to life again, as in the case above mentioned ; a still farther confirmation of how agreeable her conduct was to Almighty God, and how ready he is to reward acts of charity and mercy, when done for his sake, and to his servants. Yea, still more ; when God Almighty had resolved to send a dreadful famine upon the land, which was to last for seven years, Elisha foretold it to his benefactress, advising her to leave her country during that time, in order to avoid that misery, which she did accordingly ; and after seven years were passed, and plenty restored to the land, the goodness of God ordered matters so, that, Elisha being then dead, his servant was relating to the king the wonderful doings of his master, and especially the raising this woman's son from the dead, at the very instant of time when the woman and her son, being returned to their own country, presented themselves to the king to petition that their lands might be restored to them again, which, it seems, had been seized upon in their absence ; *And Gehazi said, my Lord, O king, this is the woman, and this is her son whom Elisha restored to life.* This providential concurrence of favourable circumstances had  
such



such an effect upon the king, that, without more ado, *he appointed unto her a certain officer, saying, restore all that was hers, and all the fruits of the field, since the day she left the land even until now,* 2 Kings viii. See here what a chain of benefits miraculously bestowed upon this good woman in reward of her charity, as the more immediate end proposed by them, but which, at the same time, most admirably displayed the infinite power and goodness of God, and cannot fail to produce the most excellent effects in the hearts of all those who believe them, as well as it, without doubt, did in those who received the immediate beneficent effects produced by them.

VIII. The deliverance of the three children from the fiery furnace, and of Daniel from the mouths of the lions in a particular manner also belong to this class; for though they produced more extensive good effects than the preservation of these holy men, and were proofs to these heathen nations where they were done, that the God of Israel was the only true God, as we have seen above, yet the holy scripture attributes these most glorious miracles in a particular manner as a reward for the confidence these good souls had in God, and their constancy in his service, as the more immediate end directly intended by them. The confidence which the three holy young men had in God is plain from their heroic answer to Nebuchadnezzar,

chadnezzar, when he ordered them, under pain of being thrown into the fiery furnace, to fall down and adore the idol he had set up, adding this impious vaunt, *And who is that God that shall deliver you out of my hands?* Dan. iii. 15. To which they replied, *Our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us from thine hand, O king,* ver. 17. And their constancy in the service of their God, they express in the following verse in these beautiful words, *But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy Gods, nor worship the golden image that thou hast set up.* And that their miraculous preservation was intended directly as a reward of these their virtues, is acknowledged by the king himself, when after calling them out of the furnace, he said, *Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, who has sent his angel and delivered his servants WHO TRUSTED IN HIM—and yielded their bodies, THAT THEY MIGHT NOT SERVE NOR WORSHIP ANY GOD EXCEPT THEIR OWN GOD,* Ibid. ver 28. And as for Daniel, when the king came next morning to the den of lions, and cried to him, *O Daniel, servant of the living God, is thy God, WHOM THOU SERVEST CONTINUALLY, able to deliver thee from the lions?* Daniel immediately answered him, *my God hath sent his angel, and hath shut the lions' mouths that they have not hurt me; forasmuch as before him INNOCENCY WAS FOUND IN ME,* Dan. vi. 20. &c.

And

And upon this, by the king's command, *Daniel was taken up out of the den, and no manner of hurt was found upon him, because he believed in his God, ver. 23.* These beautiful examples need no application.

IX. To the third class belong all these examples in holy writ, in which we find the divine goodness condescending to work miracles, and in many cases even of the first rate, where the immediate end directly intended was only to supply the various bodily wants of particular persons, and that sometimes in things of so little consequence as to unassisted natural reason would seem perfectly trifling and altogether unworthy of such divine interposition. Sampson is employed by Almighty God to deliver his people from the yoke of the Philistines, and to fight their battles against these their enemies; for this purpose he is endued with a most amazing strength, with which he performs wonders. One day he goes out against them all alone, with no other arms than the jaw-bone of an ass, he enters the battle, gains an entire victory, and kills a thousand men with his own hand; but alas! scorched by the heat of the day, and exhausted with such hard labour, he is upon the point of perishing himself with thirst after the battle is ended. Does the Almighty forsake his servant in this extremity? By no means; he even works a miracle to relieve him; for upon his crying to him for help, *he clave an hollow place that was in the jaw-bone of*  
the



*the ass*, which he had thrown out of his hand; and lo! it sends forth a stream of water to supply his want, relieve his thirst and refresh him, Judges xv.

X. The great Elias is ordered to fly to the desert from the face of his persecuting enemy who sought his life only upon account of his steady adherence to the service of his God. This may be thought to have been only flying from one death to another, from the sword of Achab to famine in the wilderness. But his God is his Protector, and works a most unheard-of miracle to sustain him; he commands the wild ravens to provide for his servant, and accordingly they bring him every day a piece of flesh and a loaf of bread, whilst the brook supplied his drink; and this miraculous provision continued to be brought him daily so long as he stayed in that desert. Another time the same great prophet was again in the wilderness, destitute of all human assistance, and an angel is sent with a cake of bread and a bottle of water to feed him, and such strength communicated to him by this miraculous food, that he needed nothing else for the space of forty days thereafter.

XI. A poor widow woman is oppressed by her husband's creditors, to whom having nothing to pay, they seize upon her two sons to carry them off for bond slaves. In this sad distress she flies to the prophet Elisha,

Elifha, and puts him in mind that her husband had been a good man, as he himself knew, and one that feared the Lord. The prophet, moved with compassion at her situation, asks what she had in the house, and she answered she had nothing in the world but a pot of oil: Well, says the man of God, *Go borrow thee vessels abroad of all thy neighbours, even empty vessels, borrow not a few; and when thou art come in, thou shalt shut the door upon thee and upon thy sons, and thou shalt pour out into all those vessels, and thou shalt set aside that which is full.* Accordingly they went to work, and the oil was so multiplied in her hands, that it continued to flow in great abundance, and never stopt till they had no more empty vessels in which to put it. Then the prophet ordered her to sell this miraculous oil and pay her debts, and that she and her sons might live upon the rest, 2 Kings. iv.

XIII. Again, *The men of the city said unto Elifha, behold, I pray thee, the situation of this city is pleasant, as my Lord seeth, but the water is naught, and the ground barren. And he said, bring me a new cruise, and put salt therein, and they brought it to him; and he went forth unto the spring of the waters, and cast the salt in there, and said: Thus sayeth the Lord, I have healed these waters, there shall not be from thence any more death or barren land. So the waters were healed unto this day, according*

according to the saying of Elisha which he spake,  
2 Kings ii. 19.

XIII. In the time of a great dearth, the same holy prophet came to Gilgal, and a number of the sons of the prophets were sitting before him; and he said to his servant, Set on the great pot, and seeth pottage for the sons of the prophets; and one went out into the field to gather herbs, and found a wild vine, and gathered there of wild gourds his lapful, and came and shred them into the pot of pottage, for they knew them not. So they poured out for the men to eat; and it came to pass, as they were eating of the pottage, that they cried out and said, O thou man of God, there is death in the pot! And they could not eat thereof. The prophet, unwilling to lose so great a quantity of food in the time of famine, immediately performs a miracle to cure it, by only casting a little meal into the pot; and he said, then bring meal: And he cast it into the pot, and he said, Pour out for the people that they may eat, and there was no harm in the pot, 2 Kings iv. Again, during the same famine, a present was brought to Elisha of twenty loaves of barley, and some full ears of corn, which he immediately ordered to be given to the people, and his servant said, What! should I set this before a hundred men? But Elisha replied, Give the people that they may eat, for thus sayeth the Lord, they shall eat and shall leave thereof; and accordingly these loaves

were



were so miraculously multiplied, that *they did eat and left thereof, according to the word of the Lord,* 2 Kings iv.

XIV. The two holy prophets, Elijah and Elisha, are walking together to the place where the former was to be taken up; in their way they came to the river Jordan, which there was no human means for them to pass; and, after standing a little by the river, *Elijah took his mantle and wrapt it together, and smote the waters, and they were divided hither and thither, so that they two went over on dry ground,* 2 Kings ii. And the same miraculous division was repeated again in favour of Elisha alone, when he was returning home, after his master had been taken from him. Lastly, To mention only one instance more under this class, when the sons of the prophets were cutting wood on the banks of the Jordan, in order to enlarge their dwelling-place which was become too strait for them, it happened that the head of one of their axes fell into the water; the poor man was greatly afflicted at this misfortune, and cried to Elisha who was present with them, *Alas! master, for it was borrowed: Elisha, pitying the poor man's case, said, where fell it? and he shewed him the place; and he cut down a stick, and cast it in thither, and the iron did swim. Therefore, said he, take it up to thee, and he put out his hand and took it,* 2 Kings vi. Many other instances might be brought, from the cur-

ing diseases, delivering from dangers, and the like; but these are obvious through the whole scripture, and what I have here related are fully sufficient for my present purpose.

XV. Now, in all these examples related under this class, and others of the same nature that might be brought, we see evidently, that the immediate end directly intended by Almighty God in working these most surprising miracles, was the relieving the temporal wants of particular persons; and that not only in the greater and more necessary concerns of life, such as the supplying them with food when they must have perished without it, or the delivering them from other imminent dangers of death, but even in their more trifling needs, and such as in the judgment of natural reason might seem quite unworthy of such great miracles; such are the two cases last mentioned. The end proposed by these miracles was not the confirming any point of doctrine disputed, or authorising any new revelation; for such here there was none; neither was it properly to manifest the sanctity of his servants, though this was also a consequence of some of them; for of this in most of these cases the people were already fully convinced: Yea, and several of the most remarkable of these miracles were done in private, in favours of these holy people, and unknown to the world till they themselves had discovered them. Hence, then, the only end immediately and directly intended by these miracles

miracles was, as we have seen, the relieving the temporal wants of particular persons in distress. We must therefore conclude, as a necessary consequence of these facts, that in the judgment of God himself, the relieving the temporal needs of mankind, even of particular persons, is an end worthy of him to procure, even by the most extraordinary miracles. But it will easily appear, at the same time, that the doing so is a most admirable and well adapted means to secure the other more valuable and important ends, common to every miracle, the glory of God and the good of souls; seeing nothing can give us a more feeling sense of the infinite goodness and power of God, than when we ourselves receive the beneficent effects of miracles wrought in our favours, nor, at the same time, contribute more powerfully to excite the most ardent affections of gratitude, confidence, and love towards our kind and bountiful Benefactor. The futility also, and weakness of the Deist's objections, drawn either from the apparent insignificancy of the thing done, as being thereby unworthy of God, or from its amazing greatness, as requiring an end proportionably great also, will easily appear from what has been said above. The great and important ends of miracles are to manifest the goodness and power, and other attributes of God, and to promote the sanctification of our souls: Now, what can more contribute to those glorious ends than to see the Almighty condescending to



work miracles to supply even the most trifling needs of his servants, such as to help them over a water on their journey, and cause the iron head of an axe, when lost in a water, to swim on the surface, and be restored to them again? or to find him, on the other hand, when their needs require it, overturning, in a manner, all the laws of the universe, and reversing the very nature of things, so as to tame the rage of hungry and furious lions, and deprive the fire of its power to burn, in order to defend those that trust in him? The trifling smallness, if I may be allowed to use the expression, of the miracles wrought in the one case, and their amazing greatness in the other, equally contribute to the same great end, namely, the manifesting in the most lively colours the infinite love of God to man; and those who make objections against miracles from these very considerations, show that they themselves are perfectly ignorant of the nature of true love, and of the tender feelings of the human heart. On the one hand, true love thinks nothing little, nothing trifling, nothing unworthy its attention, that can be of service or give pleasure to the beloved object, however much it may appear so to an indifferent person: And, on the other hand, it braves all dangers, despises all hardships, and cheerfully undergoes all labours, however great, or even seemingly above its strength, when the interest or happiness of the beloved object requires it. And such is the delicate  
frame

of the human heart, that it is impossible for it to resist the influence of such a conduct; it is by no means proof against attacks of this kind: for whether we perceive a continual attention in another to give us pleasure, and oblige us on all occasions, however trifling in themselves, or see that other exerting himself in doing great things for our service; in either case we are equally convinced of the sincerity of that person's love, and our heart is naturally and most powerfully inclined to make a suitable return of the most tender affection. How convincing, then, and at the same time how tender, how affecting a proof is it of the infinite love of God to man, when we see him, the sovereign Lord of all things, condescend to make use of both these ways of gaining our hearts to himself! whilst, on the one hand, he shows such an amiable attention to all our little wants, as even miraculously to supply them; and, on the other, thinks nothing of performing the greatest miracles when the necessities of his servants require it? What an effect must this have upon a grateful soul? what tender and affectionate feelings must it necessarily raise in the breast of man towards that supreme and all-glorious Being, who gives such affecting proofs of the sincerity of his love to us, and uses such amiable arts to court and gain our affections? But oh, what obdurate, what inhuman hearts must those have who can resist these attacks, nay, who even dare to laugh at and ridicule this amiable

amiable conduct of their Creator, call in question, and absolutely deny its very being and existence; and that for those very reasons which are the most convincing proofs of this sincerity, as well as of the greatness of his love and affection to his creatures! But to return.

XVI. The fourth and last class which I shall here take notice of, contains cases of a very different immediate tendency from those of the former, though no less conducive than they to the same great general ends of miracles, the glory of God and the good of souls, by manifesting, along with his almighty power, the severity and rigour of his justice, and striking the hearts of sinners with a sense of their danger, and a salutary fear of offending him, whom they see so severely punishing either themselves or others for past sins, and even working miracles no less amazing than those of the former classes, for accomplishing this end with the greater certainty. Some of the miracles of this class have immediately in view only the correction of the sinner himself, and not his destruction; whilst others destroy the delinquent intirely, and serve principally for an example and warning to others; to which, however, the former do also greatly contribute. And in both we shall find, that the divine wisdom operates in the same way as in the preceeding cases, sometimes accomplishing these ends by the weakest instruments, which, in the language



guage of modern infidels, would be called unworthy of God, and below his Majesty ; such as the flies, frogs, lice, and other vermin by which he punished Pharoah ; the hornets by which he drove out the Canaanites before his people, and the like ; and at other times performing the greatest miracles for the same purposes ; equally, however, in both cases manifesting his own glory and sovereignty ; by the former he convinces mankind that he stands in no need of the help of his creatures to accomplish his ends, or to punish those who offend him, whilst the weakest instruments in his hand serve equally for this purpose as the greatest ; and by the latter he shows, in the most feeling manner, the immensity of his power, whilst all created nature becomes subservient to his will, when he pleases to employ it.

XVII. The first example I shall take notice of here, is that of Lot's wife. When the angels had taken Lot and his family out of Sodom, they commanded them to flee with all speed to the place appointed for them, that they might not be involved in the destruction of that devoted city, and expressly forbid them so much as to look behind them ; *Escape for thy life, says the angel, look not behind thee, neither stay thee in all the plain ; escape to the mountain lest thou be consumed.* Lot's wife, solicitous for her friends and the goods she had left behind her in Sodom, stirred up by her curiosity,

sity, and unmindful of, or disregarding this order of the angel, looked back to see what was doing, and immediately the hand of God was upon her in a most miraculous manner in punishment of her disobedience, and *she became a pillar of salt*; a lasting monument of the severity of God's justice upon those who disobey him! Gen. xix. Now, here we must observe that the immediate good end obtained by this miracle regarded only Lot and his two daughters, who only at that time knew the prohibition given, the transgression committed, and the punishment inflicted; and consequently we see here a miracle proper to the almighty power of God alone, *viz* the instantaneous changing a living person into a pillar of salt, performed to the utter destruction of that person in punishment of her crime, where the immediate end directly intended, and, as may be presumed, obtained, was the benefit of three souls only, and the being a warning to them against sin; and consequently that this, in the judgment of God, is an end worthy of him to be procured even by the greatest miracle: But then it must be also owned that the good effects of it were not confined to these three at last, but extended to all those in after-ages who should hear and believe what is here related, as displaying to them also the dreadful consequences of sin, and the severity of the divine judgments, and of course stirring up in their hearts a salutary fear of offending their great Creator: And this is the very

use

use that Jesus Christ himself makes of this example in the gospel, when foretelling the manner of the revelation of the son of man, which to each one in particular will be at the hour of his death, and exhorting us to take off our affections from all creatures, as the best disposition to be in for that day, he says, *Remember Lot's wife*, Luke xvii. 32. intimating, that as her affection for what she possessed and was obliged to leave behind her in Sodom, prompted her to look back contrary to the command given her, and consequently brought on her utter ruin and destruction, so likewise, if our hearts and affections be tied to the things of this world when we are forced to leave all behind us, and to appear before the son of man at his revelation to us at death, this attachment will become an occasion of our offending God, and bring upon us likewise ruin and destruction.

XVIII. The beautiful history which the scripture gives us of Balaam and his ass deserves a particular place here, as displaying a most admirable miracle performed, for no other immediate and direct end but the correcting a person for a sin committed. When the second messengers of Balak came for Balaam to go to their master, upon his consulting God whether he should go or not, the answer he received was, *If the men come to call thee, rise up and go with them*; Balaam being very desirous of going himself, instead of waiting till



till they should come and call him, rose up in the morning and saddled his ass, and went with the princes of Moab. It were an injury done to the sacred scripture to give what follows in any other words than its own, they have something so particularly affecting in them. And God's anger was kindled because he went: And the angel of the Lord stood in the way for an adversary against him. Now, he was riding upon his ass, and his two servants with him. And the ass saw the angel of the Lord standing in the way, and his sword drawn in his hand, and the ass turned aside out of the way, and went into the field: And Balaam smote the ass to turn her into the way. But the angel of the Lord stood in a path of the vineyard, a wall being on this side, and a wall on that side: And when the ass saw the angel of the Lord, she thrust herself unto the wall, and crush'd Balaam's foot against the wall, and he smote her again. And the angel of the Lord went further, and stood in a narrow place, where there was no way to turn either to the right hand or to the left. And when the ass saw the angel of the Lord, she fell down under Balaam; and Balaam's anger was kindled, and he smote the ass with a staff. AND THE LORD OPENED THE MOUTH OF THE ASS, and she said unto Balaam, What have I done unto thee that thou hast smitten me these three times? and Balaam said unto the ass, Because thou hast mocked me; I would there were a sword in mine hand, for now would I kill thee. And the ass said unto Balaam,

*Balaam, Am not I thine ass, upon which thou hast ridden ever since I was thine, unto this day? Was I ever wont to do so unto thee? And he said, Nay. And the Lord opened the eyes of Balaam, and he saw the angel of the Lord standing in the way, and his sword drawn in his hand, and he bowed down his head and fell flat on his face; and the angel of the Lord said unto him, Wherefore hast thou smitten thine ass these three times? Behold, I went out to withstand thee, because thy way is perverse before me: And the ass saw me, and turned from me these three times: Unless she had turned from me, surely now also I had slain thee and saved her alive. And Balaam said, I have sinned, &c. Numb.*

xxii. This beautiful relation needs neither comment nor application; for, though infidelity may find occasion here to laugh and sneer at the seeming disproportion between the thing done and the end to be gained, at the apparent inutility of being at so much pains to correct Balaam, which might have been brought about in a much simpler manner, by the angel's appearing to himself for example, and telling him he did wrong; and tho' it may have recourse to its own vain and human ideas, of what is becoming God to do or not to do, and tell us his infinite wisdom will surely go always by the nearest, plainest and simplest means, to gain its ends; and that we are not to suppose, that Almighty God will use so many unnecessary means for what he could do by one a-

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lone,

lone, &c : Yet the pious and faithful Christian opposing this plain fact, supported by the authority of God himself, against all these vain speculations, rejects all the idle ideas of human reason, concerning what is becoming or not becoming God to do; and, in this most extraordinary miracle, reads new and more convincing proofs of the infinite goodness and condescension of God towards his creatures, and finds in it the strongest incentives to love, praise, and adore his divine bounty; as also, of holy obedience to his good pleasure.

XIX. The disobedient prophet slain by a lion, is another example of this kind, where we see a most admirable miracle performed along with prophecy, in punishment of disobedience to the orders of God, though in a matter in itself seemingly of very small importance, but intended as a warning and example to others, of the great attention we ought to have in perfectly obeying the divine orders, whether the matter be small or great. This prophet, after going down to Bethel, and there delivering his own prophecy against Jeroboam and his altar, and performing two great miracles in confirmation of it, was persuaded, by the lying testimony of another prophet in that place, to go to his house and eat and drink with him, contrary to the express command of God, who had absolutely forbidden him to eat bread or drink water there : But it came to pass, as they sat at

table,



table, that the word of the Lord came unto the prophet that brought him back, and he cried to the man of God that came from Judah, saying, Thus saith the Lord, forasmuch as thou hast disobeyed the mouth of the Lord, and hast not kept the commandment which the Lord thy God commanded thee,—thy carcase shall not come into the sepulchre of thy fathers, 1 Kings xiii. This prophecy was not long 'ere it was fulfilled; for, when he was gone away upon his ass to return home, a lion met him by the way and slew him, and the carcase was cast in the way, and the ass stood by it; the lion also stood by the carcase.—Men passed by and saw this; yet the lion never offered to hurt them, but stood by the carcase, till the other prophet came to take it away to bury it; and neither eat the carcase nor tore the ass, *ibid.* ver. 28. Here we see a wild lion commissioned by God to execute his justice on this disobedient prophet, and performing his orders in the most exact and perfect manner, without turning to the right hand or to the left; nay, forgetting his natural ferocity, and perhaps the keen stings of hunger itself, he kills the prophet as he was ordered, but neither tears the carcase nor destroys the ass, nor does hurt to any that passed by, but guards the dead body, till the proper person came to bury it, and then returns to the woods from whence he came.

XX. The miraculous punishment of Gehazi, servant to Elisha the prophet, must also be particularly observed here : When this avaritious man had run after Naaman to get some money from him upon his being cured of his leprosy ; returning to his master, *Elisha said unto him, Whence comest thou, Gehazi ? And he said, thy servant went no whither. And he said unto him, Went not mine heart with thee, when the man turned again from his chariot to meet thee ? Is it a time to receive money and to receive garments ? &c. The leprosy therefore of Naaman shall cleave to thee and to thy seed for ever. And he went out from his presence a leper white as snow.* 2 Kings v. We see here how the prophet saw all that had passed, though absent from him ; and no sooner does he pronounce sentence upon his covetous servant, than immediately the punishment is inflicted ! What a demonstration of the divine justice ! What a severe correction of Gehazi ! What a lesson and warning to all others !

XXI. It is altogether needless to make any application of the facts related in this chapter ; they speak for themselves, and shew beyond reply that Almighty God himself judges it most becoming his divine Majesty, and worthy of his infinite wisdom, to perform the most amazing miracles, even where the immediate end proposed is only the benefit of particular persons, to supply their needs, to deliver them

them from dangers, or even only to gratify their ardent desires. And consequently objections formed against any miracle, from the pretended insignificance of such ends, can never be admitted by a Christian, without impeaching the divine wisdom in all the above examples, and many other such, which are to be met with in the sacred scriptures. It is no less manifest how unworthy such objections are of a rational philosopher, as they only proceed from a real or pretended ignorance of some very obvious truths; which, as we have seen above, totally enervate every objection that can be drawn from that quarter.

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CHAP.



## C H A P. VIII.

*On the INSTRUMENTS used in performing  
MIRACLES.*

I. **I**T may perhaps, at first sight, appear of little consequence to treat this subject apart by itself; but, upon reflection, we shall find several particulars that naturally come to be explained under this head, which serve still further to illustrate the nature of miracles, and to make us understand the proper sense of some expressions in the holy scripture concerning them. Besides, as the enemies of religion make a handle of the apparent weakness and insignificancy of the instruments used in working miracles, as an argument against their existence; it is therefore necessary that this objection be properly examined, that we may be able to judge exactly what weight it ought to have. There is also another question concerning this subject, which deserves our particular attention, and about which the Christian world is much divided; to wit, how far any respect and veneration is due, or may lawfully be paid to those instruments

ments which the divine wisdom is pleased to make use of in working miracles? What I propose then to do under this head, is to consider these three things in order: 1. What those instruments are, which God uses for performing miracles, and how they act. 2. What weight the argument has against the existence of miracles, which is drawn from the meanness of the instruments used in performing them. And 3. Whether any respect and veneration may lawfully be paid to these instruments?

II. That Almighty God may use any creature he pleases as an instrument in his hands for working miracles, or may perform them without any such instrument at all, if he thinks proper, is a truth which cannot be called in question. But what he actually does make use of, or has used for this purpose, can only be known from experience, and principally from what he himself has told us in his holy scriptures. Now there we find that he sometimes makes use of his rational creatures for this purpose; sometimes of irrational, and sometimes of those that are inanimate; each of which we shall consider apart. The rational creatures used by God as his instruments in working miracles, are either angels or men. When an angel is said to perform any miracle, this may be understood two ways: If the miracle wrought be not an absolute miracle, but only such with relation

on to man, and consequently within the compass of the natural abilities of an angel, then the expression means that the angel is the efficient cause of the miracle, and performs it immediately by his own strength, according to the orders he has received from God. But if the miracle be an absolute miracle, superior to all created power, and therefore proper to God alone, then the above expression signifies that the angel acts only as a mere instrument, doing or performing some condition appointed by God for him to do; and upon the doing of which God himself immediately performs the miracle. Of the former kind we have an example in the deliverance of Daniel from the lions; for, when the king came early in the morning to the den, to enquire if he was still alive, he immediately answered, *O king, live for ever! My God hath sent his angel, and hath shut the lions' mouths, that they have not hurt me.* Here we see the angel was sent by God to defend his servant, and restrain the fury of those raging animals that they should not hurt him; a thing which there is no reason to think exceeds the natural powers of an angel: Other examples of this kind are pretty frequent in holy writ. It is not perhaps so easy to give examples of the second kind; because, not knowing exactly to what extent an angel's natural power can reach, we therefore cannot determine how far any of those miracles related in the scripture as done by angels, were within their natural strength



strength or not : We don't know, for example, if it be possible for an angel by himself to raise a flame of fire *in an instant* out of a rock ; it would indeed seem more probable that it is not ; and that this is a miracle proper to God alone ; and if this be so, then we have an example of this second kind in what happened to Gideon's offering, when the angel appeared to him to give him the commission from God of delivering the people of Israel from the slavery of the Midianites : For when he brought out flesh, and bread, and broth, and laid them upon the rock before the angel, immediately, upon the angel's touching it with the end of his staff, *there rose up fire out of the rock, and consumed the flesh and the unleavened cakes,* Judg. vi. 21. Now, if the raising this flame was the immediate work of God, then the angel's part, as God's instrument, was only to perform the outward condition appointed by God, of touching the offerings with his staff, and the effect, the work of God himself, immediately ensued. We have, indeed, one pretty certain example of this in the pool of Bethesda ; of which the scripture says, *that an angel went down at a certain season into the pool and troubled the water ; whosoever then first after the troubling of the water stepped in, was made whole of whatsoever disease he had.* John v. 4. The instantaneous cure of diseases is the work of God alone ; and consequently all these cures performed at this pool were done by him ; the angel acting

acting the part of God's instrument, at the appointed season *went down and troubled the waters*, which was the part allotted by God for him to do, as a condition pre-required to the performing these cures.

III. When any miracle is said to be performed by men, the expression ought always to be understood in the last sense, viz. that God performs the miracle by them as his visible instruments, upon their doing what he requires of them for this purpose. Thus we are told in the scripture, that *God wrought special miracles by the hands of Paul*, Acts xix. 11. where we see God wrought the miracles, and St. Paul was only the means or instrument by which he did so. It is in this sense, therefore, in which we are to understand these other expressions of scripture, where the working of the miracle is attributed immediately to man, as in the Acts ii. 43. where it is said, *And many wonders and signs were done by the apostles*; for it cannot be said, that the apostles did these things by their own natural strength as the efficient causes, but that Almighty God did them by their means.

IV. Now, the co-operation which Almighty God requires from man, when he uses him as his instrument in working miracles, is both internal and external: The internal consists in a strong  
faith

faith and confidence in God, which is the disposition of soul that God always gives to those by whom he works miracles; it being the ground upon which the grace of miracles is founded. Thus our Saviour assures us, that *all things are possible to him that believes*; and that a strong faith is *able to remove mountains*, because it powerfully moves and engages God to do what it so firmly expects from him: And hence it is, that those whom God employs to work miracles, know themselves, from this interior confidence he gives them, that the miracle is to be wrought, and generally foretel they are to do it, by which a double lustre is added to the miracle, and its authority greatly enhanced. The exterior co-operation of man is performed many different ways, of which the following declared in holy writ are the principal: 1<sup>mo</sup>, By command; thus Joshua commanded the sun to stand still, and it did so; upon which the scripture adds, *And the Lord hearkened to (or obeyed) the voice of a man*: Josh. x. 14. shewing by this expression, that God was the efficient cause, by whom the sun was stopped, and that he did it at the command or desire of Joshua his servant. Elias also, once and again, commanded fire to come down from heaven, and he was instantly obeyed: And when St Peter cured the lame man, he spoke also by command, *In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk*. Acts iii.—2<sup>do</sup>, By prayer of which there are numbers of examples throughout the scripture.



scripture. Thus, when Moses undertook and promised that Pharaoh should be delivered from the frogs and flies, besides the confidence he had in God, expressed in his positive and absolute declaration to Pharaoh, that at the time he appointed they should leave him; he had also recourse to prayer as the external part God required of him to act in this matter: *And Moses cried unto the Lord, because of the frogs which he had brought against Pharaoh, and the Lord did according to the word of Moses, and the frogs died, &c. Exod. viii. 12, 13.* Again, *And Moses intreated the Lord, and the Lord did according to the word of Moses, and he removed the swarms of flies, Ibid. ver. 30, 31.* So also Sampson in his great thirst cried unto the Lord, and he most miraculously supplied him with water out of the dry jaw-bone of an ass. *Judg. xv.* In like manner, Samuel, full of confidence that God would perform the miracle of sending thunder and rain in an instant, at his desiring it, first foretold it boldly to the people, and then *cried unto the Lord, and the Lord sent thunder and rain in a moment, tho' a fine clear harvest day. 1 Sam. xii. 18.* Elias, in his famous competition with Baal's prophets, had scarce finished his prayer, when *the fire of the Lord fell and consumed the burnt-sacrifice, and the word, &c. 1 Kings xviii.* Thus also the miracles wrought on Gideon's fleece, the sun's going back ten degrees, and numbers of others related in the holy scriptures, were obtained by prayer,

as the external condition required on the part of man. 3<sup>to</sup>, By touching; thus the sick were cured by laying on hands, and Elijah and Elisha, when they raised from the dead the sons of the two women with whom they dwelt, both prayed and stretched out their bodies upon the dead corpse, and they were immediately restored to life; and of Elijah, the scripture says, *And the Lord heard the voice of Elijah, and the soul of the child came to him again, and he revived*, 1 Kings xvii. 22. thereby distinguishing, as we have done above, the part that belonged to God from what was done by the prophet. 4<sup>to</sup>, By prayer and command together; thus when St Peter raised up Tabitha from the dead, *he prayed; and turning himself to the body, he said, Tabitha, arise; and she opened her eyes, and when she saw Peter she sat up*, Acts ix. 5<sup>to</sup>, By affirming the thing to be so; thus, the moment Elisha said to his servant, *The leprosy of Naaman shall cleave unto thee*; that instant he was immediately seized with it, *and he went out from his presence a leper white as snow*, 2 Kings v. 27. 6<sup>to</sup>, By affirming it in the name of God; so Elisha said to the widow of Zarephath, *Thus sayeth the Lord, the barrel of meal shall not waste, neither shall the cruse of oil fail, until the day that the Lord sendeth rain upon the earth*, 1 Kings xvii. This last is very common among the prophets, and is a kind of prophecy flowing from their strong faith.

V. In all the above cases we see the different ways in which men co-operated immediately by themselves as instruments in the hand of God for working miracles; but in many other cases he required that those by whom he wrought any miracle should use other inanimate creatures for this purpose as inferior instruments; and, upon their doing with these what he required, the miracle was immediately performed. Thus he commanded Moses to smite the waters of Egypt with his rod, that they might be turned into blood, Exod. vii. 20. and to stretch out his rod over the Red Sea, that it might be divided, Exod. xiv. 16. and to smite the rock that it might send forth water, Exod. xvii. 9. Aaron also is commanded to stretch out his hand with his rod over the streams that the frogs might come up, Exod. viii. 5. and to strike the dust of the earth with his rod that it might become lice, *ibid.* ver. 17. All which was done accordingly, whenever these two great men performed their part assigned them by God: And the respective parts which God and they acted in all these and other such cases, is particularly distinguished in the plagues of hail and locusts, where, after relating what God commanded them to do, the scripture adds, *and Moses stretched forth his rod towards heaven, and the Lord sent thunder and hail, &c.* Exod. ix. 9. And again, *and Moses stretched forth his rod over the land of Egypt, and the Lord brought the east wind—and the east wind brought the locusts,* Exod. io. 13.

VI. Now



VI. Now it is here particularly to be observed, that God has been pleased to make use of many different creatures in the hands of his servants as inferior instruments for working miracles, and often of such as appear the meanest and most insignificant in the eyes of man. What more worthless and mean than burnt ashes? yet Almighty God commands Moses to take some ashes from the furnace, and *sprinkle them towards heaven, that is, throw them up in the air, in order to produce the plague of boils breaking out on man and beast throughout all the land of Egypt*, Exod. x. 8. 9. So Elijah smiting the waters of Jordan *with his mantle, they were divided hither and thither*, and he and Elisha *went over on dry ground*, 2 Kings ii. 8. A handful of salt thrown into the springs of poisonous and unwholesome waters by Elisha, both healed the waters, and made the country fertile, which before had been barren, 2 Kings ii. 20. A little meal thrown into the pot of pottage, by the same prophet, cured it of the poison of these noxious herbs which had been inadvertently put into it, 2 Kings iv. A bit of wood cut down from the tree being thrown into the Jordan by the same holy man, caused the heavy lump of iron that had fallen into the river, to rise up and swim on the surface of the waters, 2 Kings vi. From these, then, and many other such examples, which we meet with in holy scripture, we see clearly that Almighty God has often made

use of the meanest creatures in the hands of his holy servants, as instruments by which he performs the most astonishing miracles.

VII. Having thus seen in what manner the divine wisdom makes use of his rational creatures in the working of miracles, and what part they act therein, I now proceed to consider the examples we have in the holy scriptures, which discover to us in what manner the irrational creatures are used by Almighty God for the same end; and on this we need be very short; for whatever way the learned world may account for what is called instinct in the brute creation, certain it is, that as they have not free will to resist the impressions of the Creator upon them, as man has, they are in this respect more immediately under his influence, and that, whatever he is pleased to require of them, they are immediately obedient to his holy will. When Almighty God requires any thing of man, he not only manifests his will to him externally, but also must assist him by the internal influence of his grace to perform it: It is true, when he absolutely wills man should comply, he infallibly obtains his compliance without prejudice to his liberty; but it is also no less true, that man too, too often resists the will of his Creator, nay, acts diametrically the reverse of what he knows his Creator requires from him. But with the irrational creatures it is not so; they are incapable of knowing and understanding

understanding the will of their master, but they are also incapable of resisting whatever impressions he is pleased to make upon them, however contrary they may be to their natural dispositions, or to those usual modes of action to which their ordinary instinct impells them. And the miracles which God performs by these creatures, generally consist in making them act and behave in a manner which is quite contrary to their natural mode of conduct, in order to obtain thereby such ends as the divine wisdom has in view by so doing. Now the holy scripture points out some examples of this kind, where God Almighty was pleased to make use of the brute creatures, and make them act in a very extraordinary manner for promoting his own designs on men : *1mo*, For *correcting sinners*; thus he gave to Balaam's ass the power of speech, and enabled it to argue in a rational manner, in order to convince that wicked prophet of his unreasonable conduct, and of his cruelty towards itself. *2do*, For *punishing sinners*; thus he sent swarms of hornets upon the people of Canaan, to destroy them by their stings, and foretold that he would do so to punish those wicked nations, and convince his own people that he fought for them, See Exod. xxiii. 28. Deut. vii. 20. and Joshua xxiv. 12. In like manner, after the dispersion of the ten tribes, when the new inhabitants came to dwell in their land, the scripture says, *And so it was that at the beginning of their dwelling there, they feared not the*



*Lord; therefore the Lord sent lions among them, which slew some of them, 2 Kings xvii. 25.* In both which cases the scripture assures us, that the behaviour of these hornets and lions, in leaving their own places in such numbers, and attacking whole nations of people contrary to their natural conduct, as these people were not injuring them, nor destroying them, was the immediate work of God for punishing those sinful people. Several other examples of this kind we also have in the locusts, frogs, flies, lice, &c. with which the Egyptians were scourged; for though these miraculous punishments were brought about by the means of Moses and Aaron, which made me take notice of them in the former class of the rational instruments; yet, as it was not what Moses and Aaron did, but the immediate influence of the will of God upon these creatures, which determined them to torment the Egyptians, whilst they had no power to hurt the people of God; they are, therefore, proper examples here also to show how God is pleased to make the very brutes themselves act in a miraculous manner, when he pleases, for his own wise ends and purposes. We have also another example of this kind in the fiery serpents which he sent among his people as a punishment of their murmuring against him. *3tio, For bestowing favours upon his faithful servants;* thus he commanded the ravens to feed Elijah in the wilderness, and these creatures, obedient to the divine will, tho' diametrically

diametrically opposite to their own natures, never failed, during all the time the prophet staid there, to bring him bread and flesh twice every day.

VII. The last class of instruments used immediately by God himself in working miracles, as above taken notice of, are the inanimate creatures. These are of different kinds, as we find taken notice of in scripture, but chiefly these four, holy relicks, holy images, holy places, and holy things, consecrated to the external worship of God, by means of all which we find many surprising miracles performed by Almighty God, and related both in the Old and New Testament : But it will not be amiss here, before we consider the examples themselves, to explain what is meant by the word *holy* ; for there seems to be some ambiguity in it which may occasion mistakes, and, on that account, makes a proper explication of it necessary. God is essential holiness, and the source of all holiness, and therefore, the nearer any creature approaches to God, the more holy it must be. Hence *holiness*, in the most general sense of the word, signifies the being separated from other creatures, and united to the Creator. This *separation* and *union* may be done several different ways, according to the nature of the thing which we call *holy* ; and it is from this difference in the nature of the separation from other creatures, and of the union with God, that the different senses of the word *holy* take their rise,

rife, of which we shall here consider the most remarkable.

IX. The word *holiness*, or *sanctity*, when applied to the rational creatures, is the same as christian virtue and perfection; for the more the heart of man is detached from all inordinate tie or affection to any creature, and the more he is united in his affections to God, the more holy, the more virtuous, the more perfect he is. By this expression, then, *a holy person* is understood one who is a great friend of God, highly favoured by him, adorned with his holy grace, separated in his affections from all irregular or inordinate tie to any creature, and united, by a holy resignation of his will, to his great Creator: And, in this sense, it implies a great purity of heart and love to God on the part of man, and a reciprocal affection on the part of God towards him, adorning his soul in a particular manner with his divine grace and holy virtues.

X. Another tie by which man becomes united to God, is when he is employed by God as his minister and ambassador to man, and for this end has received from God that sacred authority and those spiritual powers which are necessary for acting in that character. The union here with God is manifest; as also the separation, which this union naturally implies in such a person, from all such worldly



or secular employments as might in the least degree interfere with, or hinder the duties of his high station to which God has called him. Thus, St Paul, speaking of his apostleship, says, that he was *called to be an apostle, separated unto the gospel of God, Rom. i. that is, separated from all secular concerns, and dedicated to the service of God, and of his gospel*; and writing to Timothy, he calls the ministers of the gospel soldiers of Jesus Christ, employed in fighting his battles, and says to Timothy, *Thou, therefore, endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life, that he may please him who has chosen him to be a soldier, 2 Tim. ii. 4.* For this reason the ministers of God are always esteemed holy; and undoubtedly they are so in the sense here explained, that is in the character they bear, and in the powers and authority with which God has vested them. But as the union with God, and separation from creatures, in this case are very different from those in the preceeding case, so our idea of the holiness resulting from them is different also; the one is *holiness of person*, the other *holiness of character*; the former may well be, and often is without the latter; but the light of reason, at first view, shows that the latter ought always to be accomplished by the former; yet this is only a moral congruency, but by no means an absolute necessity; seeing the character and all its powers may exist, and are holy,

ly, though there be no holiness of person; nay, what is much to be regretted, it is but too often the case, that the sanctity of the person does not keep pace with the character.

XI. If now we consider what the term *holiness* means when applied to inanimate things, we shall find a very different idea implied in it from both the former, and also among themselves, according to the different connections these creatures have with God: For, *1mo*, Some things are set apart for the external worship of God, and dedicated totally to his service, such as the ark, the temple, the churches, the altar, sacred vestments, sacred vessels, and the like, which are therefore called and esteemed holy. Their separation from other creatures consists in this, that they are no more to be used for profane uses, nor by common hands; they no longer belong to this world, nor to worldly purposes; and they are not to be handled nor treated in a light careless manner, but with a due respect as things belonging to God, and united to him, by being entirely appropriated to his service. *2do*, There are some things which God Almighty has himself expressly appointed and ordained to be used in his church, as the constant and undoubted means of bestowing the greatest of all blessings upon our souls, his heavenly grace, both for the cleansing away the guilt of our sins, and strengthening us against relapses: These are his holy sacraments

craments, to the pious and devout use of which he has annexed these valuable graces. These, therefore, are most justly esteemed exceeding holy, in as much as they are intirely separated from all profane uses, and can never be treated with disrespect, nor abused, without the highest guilt being thereby incurred; and their union with God is extremely great; in as much as they are the never failing canals on his part of bringing his divine grace to our souls. 3<sup>th</sup>io, There are other things which, by human appointment, are set apart for similar uses, and therefore esteemed sacred and holy by the Christian people: For seeing the general conduct of the divine providence is to make use of other inanimate creatures as the means by which many blessings are bestowed on man; and knowing that prayer is a most powerful means to obtain such blessings from God, by the sanctified use of his creatures; and knowing, at the same time, that the public prayers of the church are the most efficacious of all others for this purpose; for these reasons, we find it has been the constant practice of the Christian world, from the very earliest ages, to set apart as *holy* certain things, which were blessed by the priests of the church, imploring the divine goodness to be pleased, in virtue of these prayers, to grant such and such special blessings to those who, with pious dispositions, should use these creatures over which such blessing has been made: Now creatures thus blessed are esteemed holy according



according to that of St Paul, *Every creature is good, and nothing to be refused if it be received with thanksgivings for it is sanctified by the word of God, and by prayer*, 1 Tim. iv. 4, 5. And this is properly what is meant by holy water, holy oil, blessed candles, albes, palms, and the like. Now their separation from other creatures, and union with God, consist in this, that they are set apart by the church as means of conveying the effects of her prayers to her children, and of obtaining some particular blessings for them, and therefore not to be used for profane uses, but with the respect due to things set apart for such holy purposes. 470, With regard to places, besides temples and churches mentioned above, which are solemnly dedicated to the divine service, and thereby justly esteemed holy, we find that epithet given to other places for a different reason. Thus, where God has been pleased at any time to manifest himself to man visibly, either by himself or by an angel, the place where this was done is called holy, and a due respect commanded to be paid to it, as sanctified by such divine presence. Thus Moses at the burning bush, and Joshua when the angel appeared to him, were ordered to put off their shoes from off their feet, for the place whereon they stood was holy ground. See also what a high idea Jacob had of the holiness of that place where God had appeared to him in his dream; *How dreadful, says he, is this place! this is none other but the house* of

of God, and this is the gate of heaven, Gen. xxviii.

17. The holy Mount Sinai, or Horeb, was ever after called the *mount of God*, and esteemed most holy, because there God appeared with so much majesty to his people when he gave them the ten commandments. In like manner, St Peter calls mount Tabor, on which he saw the transfiguration of his master, *the holy mount*. Again, if there be any particular place where God is pleased to give more manifest and uncommon signs of his presence, and of his power and goodness, by bestowing favours on man in these places, which he does no where else; such places are also most justly esteemed and respected as holy places. Under this head also come all those places where the chief mysteries of the redemption of mankind were transacted, which, in the esteem of all Christians, contract a particular holiness upon that account. Now the holiness of all those places, *that is*, their separation from other places, and the union they have with God, is easily perceived, but of a different species from those of the former classes.

XII. In all the above cases, the holiness of these creatures seems to be something inherent to them, upon account of the immediate and intrinsic connection they have with God; but there are, *5to*, other two things also esteemed holy, where the holiness seems to be more extrinsic, and more in the esteem of men than in the things themselves,

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themselves, as not resting in these things, but referred to something else to which they belong; and these are holy images, and holy relicks. Indeed, when these last consist in any part of the very body of a saint, that body, sanctified by the superabundant graces of God with which its soul was adorned; that body which was the temple of the Holy Ghost, and whose blessed soul, to which it once was, and afterwards will be again united, is now reigning with Christ in glory, seems to inherit a considerable degree of intrinsic holiness, at least as much, if not more so, than several of those things above mentioned; but when the relicks are not parts of any saint's body, but only things that had belonged to them in their lifetime, as their clothes, books, &c. or only things that had touched their bodies, the holiness which is attributed to them is of a more extrinsic kind, and acknowledged only in as far as they relate to, or have a connection with those holy persons of whom they are the relicks; such also is the case with the holiness which men attribute to the pictures or images of Christ and his saints. However, even in this case, both with regard to relicks and holy images, if at any time God should be pleased, by their means, to bestow in a miraculous manner any favour on man, they thereby contract another kind of sanctity of the same nature with that of holy places, or other things made use of by Almighty God as his instruments of bestowing benefits by miracles

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on mankind; and then they are holy upon a double account, both as being used by God for this last end, and also from the relation they have to the sacred persons to whom they belong. We must not forget here, 6<sup>to</sup>, the holy scriptures, which are justly esteemed exceeding holy, as being dictated by the Holy Ghost, and containing the sacred truths of God, and thereby having a most intimate connection with him. From what has been said, it is easy to see precisely the different senses in which these different creatures are esteemed and called *holy*, and the different grounds upon which this appellation is given them. We return now to relate the examples of miracles which the word of God presents to us as wrought by means of those inanimate holy things.

XIII. And first, with regard to holy images, we have a most beautiful example of this kind related Numb. xxi. where we are told, that when the people, upon a certain occasion, murmured and *spoke against God and against Moses*, in order to punish this their great sin, *the Lord sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people, and much people of Israel died*, ver. 6. The people, upon this, repenting of their crime, and crying to God for mercy, the remedy he himself appointed was this; *and the Lord said unto Moses, make thee a fiery serpent, and set it up upon a pole; and it shall come to pass, that every one that is bit-*

ten, WHEN HE LOOKETH UPON IT, SHALL LIVE: and Moses made a serpent of brass, and put it upon a pole; and it came to pass, that if a serpent had bitten any man, WHEN HE BEHELD THE SERPENT OF BRASS, HE LIVED, ver. 8, 9. Here we see a holy image, commanded to be set up in the sight of all the people by God himself, and a most extraordinary miracle, not once or twice, but numbers of times performed by no other application than simply looking upon it. I call this image holy for two reasons; first, upon account of its relation to Jesus Christ, of whom it was a type, figure or emblem, as he himself assures us in these words, *As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the son of man be lifted up: That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life*, John iii. 14, 15. Thereby intimating to us, that as those who had been bit by the fiery serpents, and were on that account in danger of temporal death, were immediately and perfectly cured by only looking on the brazen image of these serpents which Moses lifted up in the camp; so all those who should in after-times be bit by the stings of the infernal serpents, viz. temptations to sin, and be thereby in danger of eternal death, should find a speedy and a certain remedy by looking with a lively faith upon Jesus Christ lifted up upon the cross. For this reason, then, the brazen serpent was a lively image of Jesus Christ, and justly esteemed holy upon account of this relation

lation to him; but it deserves also that appellation in a more immediate manner, by reason that Almighty God was pleased to make use of it as an instrument by which he performed a vast multitude of most amazing miracles, proper only to God himself to perform, *to wit*, the immediate cure of the envenomed bite of these fiery serpents, which otherwise brought certain death, and that by only looking on that image which God had ordered to be set up among his people for this very purpose. And here, by the bye, I cannot forbear observing that this example is a most convincing proof that the true sense of what the Protestants call the second command, but which, in reality, is only an explication of the first, is by no means to forbid the making of pictures or images, even of holy things, and for religious purposes: For, can it ever be imagined, that the great God, had he given such a prohibition, would himself, and that so soon after, have given orders to Moses to act in direct opposition to it? It is injurious to the divine wisdom to suppose that: The true and real sense of that part of the command, then, can only be what the words themselves clearly express, the forbidding to make such images, so as to bow down to them or serve them as if they were Gods, by which they became idols, and those who thus served them were guilty of idolatry.



XIV. With regard to miracles wrought by relicks, we have several most singular instances of this in the holy scripture. When Elijah himself divided the waters of Jordan by smiting them with his mantle, this mantle was not then properly a relick, but the instrument in his hand by which God performed that miracle; but when Elisha returned with his master's mantle, and smote the waters with it, and said, *Where is the Lord God of Elijah?* the mantle then was truly and properly a relick, and the miracle of dividing the waters of Jordan, which immediately ensued, was performed by Almighty God precisely by means of this mantle as a relick, upon account of its connection with his holy servant Elijah, to whom it formerly belonged, and in whose name he was called upon to perform it. Another most extraordinary miracle, a miracle of the first rate, we find was performed by the bones of this same great prophet Elisha, some time after his death, to wit, the raising a dead man to life again: It is thus related in the scripture: *And Elisha died, and they buried him; and the bands of the Moabites invaded the land at the coming in of the year. And it came to pass, as they were burying a man, that behold, they spied a band of men; and they cast the man into the sepulchre of Elisha; and when the man was let down, and touched the bones of Elisha, he revived and stood upon his feet,* 2 Kings xiii. 20, 21. Here there were no prayers used, no means applied, not even the smallest

left expectation or thought of such a thing to be done, as the dead man's being restored to life, which therefore is solely attributed, and was solely owing to his touching the relicks of the holy prophet, as the means God was pleased to use for this purpose. In the New Testament also we have some very remarkable examples of the same thing; where we are told, that *aprons and handkerchiefs that had touched the body of St Paul were brought unto the sick, and the diseases departed from them, and the evil spirits went out of them*, Acts xix. 12. Nay, so liberal was Almighty God in working miracles by any thing that had thus touched the bodies of his saints, that even the very shadow of St Peter passing over the sick was enough to cure them; for *by the hands of the apostles were many signs and wonders wrought among the people—inso-much that they brought forth the sick unto the streets, and laid them on beds and couches, that, at the least, the shadow of Peter passing by might overshadow some of them*, Acts v. 12, 15. And the poor woman with the bloody flux in the gospel, by only touching the hem of our Saviour's garment, was immediately made whole.

XV. We have seen above several examples of miracles that were wrought by means of holy things dedicated to the service of God, particularly the ark of the covenant; the wonders performed by it in the passage of the people over Jordan,  
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Jos. vi. and vii. the miraculous effects wrought by it among the Philistines; the falling of their idols before it; the misery and destruction of that people, which accompanied it through all their cities wherever it went; and the miraculous punishments which were immediately inflicted by Almighty God upon those of his own people who profaned it. We have also taken notice of the miracles that were wrought in Babylon upon Belshazzar the king, when he profaned the sacred vessels which his father had carried off from Jerusalem, Dan. v. I shall, therefore, under this head of holy things, only add here one example more of a constant and standing miracle among the people of God by means of holy water, which never failed when the circumstances concurred in which it was appointed by God to be performed. It is related in the fifth chapter of Numbers, and was appointed by Almighty God for ascertaining the innocence, or discovering the guilt of any woman whom her husband suspected of being unfaithful to his bed: I shall relate the whole in the words of the scripture itself. *If the spirit of jealousy come upon him, and he be jealous of his wife, whether she be defiled or not, then shall the man bring his wife unto the priest, and he shall bring her offering for her—and the priest shall bring her near, and set her before the Lord. And the priest shall take HOLY WATER in an earthen vessel, and of the dust that is in the floor of the tabernacle the priest shall take, and put it into the water—and the priest shall*



shall charge her by an oath, and say unto the woman, If no man hath lien with thee, and if thou hast not gone aside to uncleanness with another instead of thy husband, be thou free from this bitter water that causeth the curse: But if thou hast gone aside to another instead of thy husband, and if thou be defiled, and some man hath lien with thee beside thy husband, then the priest shall charge the woman with an oath of cursing; and the priest shall say unto the woman, the Lord make thee a curse and an oath among thy people, when the Lord doth make thy thigh to rot and thy belly to swell; and this water that causeth the curse shall go into thy bowels, to make thy belly to swell and thy thigh to rot. And the woman shall say amen, amen. And the priests shall write these curses in a book, and he shall blot them out with the bitter water. And he shall cause the woman to drink the bitter water that causeth the curse; and the water that causeth the curse shall enter into her and become bitter—and when he hath made her to drink the water, then it shall come to pass, that if she be defiled, and have done trespass against her husband, that the water that causeth the curse shall enter into her and become bitter, and her belly shall swell, and her thigh shall rot; and the woman shall be a curse among her people. But if the woman be not defiled, but be clean, then she shall be free and shall conceive seed. This beautiful account which the scripture gives of this matter needs no comment.

XVI. We come now finally to consider the examples of miracles wrought in holy places, or to show that Almighty God is pleased to make use of some certain places preferable to others, in which he displays his magnificence and liberality towards mankind, by performing miracles in their favours at these particular places, and bestowing other benefits upon them. The first glorious instance of this kind which chiefly deserves our notice, is what happened at the dedication of the temple: This place being chosen by Almighty God as his own house, in which he was to dwell among men, he was resolved to be most liberal in bestowing his favours upon such as should have recourse to him for help in that place; and that all might know his purpose in this respect, he was pleased, that when king Solomon made the prayer of the dedication, he should particularize all those different heads of favours which people might come to pray for in it. Solomon therefore begins his prayer, by begging, *that his eyes may be open upon this house day and night; that if any injury be done a man, and the case be brought before the altar in this house, that he would judge his servants—requiting the wicked, and justifying the righteous; that if the people be overcome by their enemies, and return, and confess, and pray in this house, he would hear their prayer and forgive their sin, and bring them again to their own land; that when the heavens are shut, and there is no rain, but consequently famine and*  
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misery, upon account of their sins, if they pray towards this place, and turn from their sins, that he would hear their prayer, forgive their sins, and send them rain in its season; in time of dearth or pestilence, or blasting, or mildew, or whatever fore or sickness there be, then what prayer or what supplication soever of any man, or of all thy people Israel; when every one shall know his own sore, and his own grief, and shall spread forth his hands in this house; then hear thou from heaven, thy dwelling place, and forgive and render to every man according to all his ways, whose heart thou knowest. Also, when strangers come and pray in this house, hear thou from heaven, and do according to all that the stranger calleth to thee for, that all people may know that this house which I have built is called by thy name. If thy people go out to war, and pray unto thee—towards this house; hear thou their prayer—and maintain their cause. If they sin against thee, and thou be angry with them, and deliver them over before their enemies, and they carry them away captives, yet, if they turn and pray unto thee—and return to thee with all their hearts—and pray towards this house, which I have built for thy name—then hear thou their prayer, and maintain their cause, and forgive thy people which have sinned against thee. Now it is evident, that if this prayer was heard, and if Almighty God was always ready to grant the fervent prayers of his people made in this holy temple, or even made towards it,



it, in all these different circumstances here mentioned, or whatever other favour they might need from God ; this will prove a most glorious example of the truth in question, that God is more ready to show favours, to hear our prayers, and to bestow benefits upon us in some particular holy places, chosen by himself for this purpose, than in others. But that this was actually the case ; that this prayer of Solomon was heard by God, and granted ; and that he was determined to bestow all these favours mentioned in it upon those who should ask them from him in this his holy temple, or even turned towards it, Almighty God was pleased to evince by a most glorious miracle ; for no sooner had Solomon ended his prayer, than *the fire came down from heaven and consumed the burnt-offering ; and the glory of the Lord filled the house, and the priests of the Lord could not enter into the house of the Lord, because the glory of the Lord had filled the Lord's house. And when all the children of Israel saw how the fire came down, and the glory of the Lord upon the house, they bowed themselves with their faces to the ground and worshipped.* And not only did God give this miraculous proof of his having heard Solomon's prayer, but also he *appeared to Solomon by night, and said unto him, I have heard thy prayer, and have chosen this place to myself for a house of sacrifice. If I shut up the heaven that there be no rain ; if I command the locusts to devour the land ; or if I send pestilence among*

mong my people. If my people shall humble themselves and pray, and seek my name, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and forgive their sin, and will heal their land: Now mine eyes will be open, and mine ears attentive to the prayers that are made in this place; for now have I CHOSEN and SANCTIFIED THIS HOUSE, that my name may be there for ever, and mine eyes and mine heart shall be there perpetually. See the whole at large, 2 Chron. vi. vii. Here then we have a most irrefragable proof of Almighty God's chusing a certain place preferably to any others wherein to bestow his choicest blessings upon man, and confirming this his choice by a most glorious miracle performed before a vast multitude of people.

XVII. Again, when Naaman came to the prophet Elisha to be cured of his leprosy, and stood before his door with his horses and chariots, Elisha sent a messenger unto him saying, go and wash in Jordan seven times, and thy flesh shall come again unto thee, and thou shalt be clean, 2 Kings, v. 10. Upon this, Naaman, not knowing the counsel of the Almighty, and, like our modern wits, laughing at the thought of God's doing miracles more in one place than another, was exceeding wroth, and said, *Are not Abana and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel, &c.?* But he did not consider

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that his cure was not to be the effect of any natural quality of the water, but of the immediate power of God, who was pleased upon this occasion to exert that power by the waters of Jordan and none others; and accordingly, when, by the persuasion of his servants, he obeyed the prophet, and dipped himself seven times in Jordan, he was immediately restored to perfect health; by which he was convinced that his cure was the work of God, whom he acknowledged for the only true God, and who bestows his favours upon man when, how, and where he pleases. Another example similar to this we have in our Saviour's giving sight to the man born blind; for after anointing his eyes with the clay he had made, he said to him, *Go, wash in the pool of Siloam.* And he went and washed, and came seeing, John ix. 7. The incredulous of this age would laugh at this, and perhaps would say, he might as well have washed any where else, as all that could be intended by washing was only to take off the clay which had been put upon his eyes. But, I dare say, every serious Christian will form a very different opinion and say, that had he washed any where else he would not have got his sight at all, because this cure was not owing to any particular virtue either in the clay or in the water, but to the immediate operation of God, who had resolved to work this miracle at the pool of Siloam, and no where else. But the most remarkable example  
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this kind of any, is that of the famous pool of Bethesda with its five porches; where numbers of miracles were performed, and the most perfect cures wrought of the most inveterate, and otherwise incurable diseases; for, as the scripture tells us, *An angel went down at a certain season into the pool and troubled the waters; whosoever then first, after the troubling the waters, stepped in, was made whole of whatever disease he had,* John v. 4. Now, as this never failed at the proper season when the angel descended, here we have a most admirable example of a particular place chosen by Almighty God, where a continual series of never-failing miracles were wrought for the benefit of the distressed, which were done at no other place whatsoever.

XVIII. We have now considered pretty fully the various kinds of instruments made use of by the divine wisdom in performing miracles, and have seen the proper way in which they act; we must now go on to examine what weight that argument has against the existence of miracles, which Deists and others draw from the meanness and insignificance of the instruments used in performing them. If I were arguing upon this question with Christians who believe the sacred scriptures to be the word of God, and dictated by the Holy Ghost, it would soon and easily be determined. These sacred oracles assure us, that it is the

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ordinary conduct of the divine providence, to bring about the greatest events by the weakest instruments, in order thereby to confound the pride of man, and that no flesh might glory in itself; the foolishness of God, says St Paul, is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men. God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise, and hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things that are mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen; yea, and things that are not, to bring to nought things that are; that no flesh should glory in his presence. 1 Cor. i. 25, 27, 28. Nothing gives a faithful soul a more exalted idea of God, than these words, wherein we see how infinitely superior he is to all creatures; he has no need of any one to help him; he has no need of means or instruments to perform his work; and for that reason, when he is pleased to use any such, he generally makes use of those which to human wisdom seem to bear the least proportion to the end proposed, on purpose thereby to confound all the prudence of man, and the more beautifully to display his own divine perfections. A pious Christian who knows this, is so far from being scandalized at the seeming meanness of the instruments used in performing miracles, or from having the most distant thought that this could be used as an argument against their existence, that, on the contrary, to him it is rather a confirmation of their reality, because more conformable to the ordinary conduct

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duct of the divine providence, and more beautifully displaying his almighty power. Besides, such a person well knows that the scripture is full of examples of the most stupenduous miracles brought about by the meanest instruments, of which we have seen a great many instances above; and as he is sensible that the best way to know what is becoming God to do, is to consider what he has already done, he therefore concludes, that nothing is more becoming the infinite majesty of God, than to perform the greatest miracles by the weakest means. Is it not amazing then to hear people who pretend to be Christians, and some who even value themselves upon being zealous Christians, make use of this very argument against the existence of particular miracles, and join the common enemies of Christianity, in laying the ax to its root to undermine it? The only reason I can find for so unreasonable a conduct is what the holy prophet David says of the Israelites, upon a similar occasion, *They were mingled among the heathen, and learned their works.* Psal. cvi. 35. Daily exposed to hear the blasphemous raileries of half learned wittings against the sacred truths of religion, and reading their impious books with avidity, whilst they seldom or never give themselves the trouble to examine the weight of any one reason they bring, or to search into the solid grounds of Christianity, or even to understand to the bottom what it teaches; but dazzled with the pompous language



and flashes of wit, under which the impieties of libertines are couched, they come insensibly to fall into their way of thinking, and look upon their apparent arguments as unanswerable: Were it not from this, or some such delusion, I don't see how a serious Christian could ever be imposed upon by the silly argument we have at present in hand, or draw from it a conclusion so contrary to fact, so injurious to Almighty God, and so nearly bordering upon blasphemy itself, as it arraigns the divine wisdom of folly, in having so frequently made use of the weakest and seemingly most inadequate instruments to perform the most glorious miracles, of which the sacred scriptures are full of examples.

XIX. But leaving these apart, let us consider what can be said to show the weakness of this argument, when proposed by those others who believe not the scripture. Why, in the first place, I would ask the favour of those gentlemen to show me wherein the strength of their argument precisely lies? to show me the connection between the reason alledged and the consequence drawn? for I own I am so blind that I cannot perceive it; I easily see, in the way they propose it, a sneer, a jest, a turn of ridicule; but for any solid connection of reason, I can perceive none. A miracle is related to have happened, and is attested by as convincing evidence as could be desired by any reasonable

sonable person in such matters; but the instruments used in performing it are, in the eyes of human wisdom, mean and insignificant; and immediately the existence of the miracle and all its evidence, are, upon this account, rejected with a sneer, and the person hooted at who should dare after this to believe it: Nay, without taking the pains to pass a thought upon the evidence for its existence, no sooner have they a glimpse of what they are pleased to call mean in the instrument used, than immediately the whole is turned into a laugh, and rejected with contempt as a manifest imposture. Is this reason? is this philosophy? Before I can approve their conclusion, I must beg leave again to insist upon their shewing me the connection of this their argument: *The instrument to us seems mean and insignificant; therefore the miracle, with all its evidence, is falsehood and imposture.* The only thing that occurs to me which might be alledged to give at least a shadow of reason in this matter, is one or other of these following arguments: 1mo, *There is no proportion between the means used and the effect produced; therefore it is impossible the effect should have happened.* 2do, *It is unbecoming the divine wisdom to use such silly means to produce such amazing events; therefore the miracles never happened.* The first of these proceeds upon a supposition which is manifestly false; to wit, that the means or instruments used have a physical influence, or co-operate to the effect produced; or that God uses them as helps for that purpose.

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By what we have seen above, and by the light of reason itself, it is evident that this supposition is false and ridiculous; and therefore the consequence drawn from it is equally so. The second argument is contrary to common sense itself, since it is plain that nothing gives us a higher and more noble idea of the power and wisdom of God, than to see him act in a manner so much superior to all the wisdom of man; and were there any proportion between the means used in miracles and the effects produced, the power of God would disappear; they would cease to be any longer miracles, as a proportionable cause could be assigned for the thing done: But when there is no such proportion; nay, when we evidently see the utmost disproportion between the means applied and the effect produced, we are then naturally led to admire the infinite power of God, who produces such amazing effects by means so immensely inferior to them. Besides, tho' these things which appear to us as concurring in the performing of miracles, be called instruments or means, yet it is but in a very improper sense of the word they are so called, because in no respect whatever do they concur physically in producing the miracle; this is solely the work of God, and costs him only the will to do it: What we call means might, perhaps with greater propriety, be termed external signals in the eyes of men, to make the finger of God more evident to them; or if you please, they may be called *conditions* which Al-

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mighty God required to be performed exteriorly by man, upon the performing of which, he himself alone, or his holy angels commissioned by him, immediately work the miracle; consequently as God Almighty may ordain any such condition he pleases, and is very far from looking upon those things as mean or insignificant which appear so to man (for all inanimate creatures are of equal worth before him), it is most unreasonable to say, that it is unbecoming God to use any of these he pleases for the above purposes. Whatever different esteem man may put on ashes and gold, they are both of equal value before God, and consequently it is as much becoming him to use the one as to use the other in the performance of the greatest miracle. From all which, then, we must conclude, that the argument against the existence of any miracle, drawn from the apparent meanness or insignificancy of the instrument used, is a mere sophism, and concludes nothing; that it is altogether unbecoming a philosopher to make use of it, and, in the mouth of a Christian, bordering on blasphemy.

XX. I come now to the last thing proposed to be discussed under this head of *instruments used by God in performing miracles*; namely, to enquire whether any respect or veneration may lawfully be given to those creatures which Almighty God makes use of for this purpose? I know this is a point very much debated among Christians; and the world

world has seen a great many ridiculous things published upon this head: In order to throw as great light upon it as possible, I shall begin by examining what is the proper sense of these words, *respect*, *veneration*, *worship*, and the like; and by fixing the precise idea in which I use them, and in which, I dare say, few or none will refuse to join me, that give themselves the trouble to reflect with a little attention upon their own minds. Now in doing this, I apprehend we ought to distinguish carefully these three things; first, the judgment we form in our understanding of the excellencies or qualities of any object proposed to us; secondly, the value or esteem we put upon it upon account of these excellencies; thirdly, the external signs, either in words or actions, by which we manifest to others the opinion we have of its excellencies, and the value and esteem we put upon it on their account. These three things are naturally connected together, and flow from one another in the order here laid down; for, according to the judgment we form of the excellencies of any thing, so, generally speaking, is the esteem and value we put upon it; and when we have a high opinion of any object, and for that reason put a great value upon it, such is the strong connection between our souls and bodies, that we naturally show this our opinion and esteem of it by these outward signs which are expressive thereof, whether in words or actions: And these three things joined together seem to include the whole

whole of that complex idea in its general sense, which is expressed by the words *respect, veneration, worship, adoration*, or the like. Hence, therefore, we may lay down this general and unexceptionable rule, to regulate our inquiries into the point in question; *viz.* “When the judgment we form  
“of the excellencies of any object is exactly just;  
“when we put such a value and esteem upon it as  
“these excellencies deserve; and when we manifested outwardly, by our words or actions, these interior dispositions of our mind towards that object; then this is a just and laudable respect, which  
“common sense itself must allow to be not only  
“lawful, but a debt strictly due to any person or  
“thing which possesses those excellencies that deserve to be so valued and esteemed; and which  
“we never fail to think ourselves intitled to from  
“others, when we know or even fancy ourselves to  
“be possessed of any such excellency or valuable  
“qualification.”

XXI. Now, for the more perfect understanding of this matter, we must observe further, 1. That the judgment we form of the excellencies of the object, is the root from which the other two parts flow; this is seated in the understanding, and it is chiefly upon the justness and falsity of this judgment that the truth or falsehood of the subsequent respect depends: For, if I know a nobleman, for example, to be what he is, and form a true judgment



ment concerning his dignity, and the respect or veneration I owe to him conformable to this judgment, then this respect when given him is just and true; but if I, by a false judgment, take this nobleman to be the king, and consequently have that interior esteem for him, and show him that outward respect which belongs only to the king, then this respect and veneration I pay to him is false and unjust, and what does by no means belong to him; but then it is clear that this is solely owing to the false judgment I make of him. And, on the other hand, when, by a false judgment, I look upon the object as not having the excellencies which it really possesses; this leads to a want of due respect, or to a false respect, by defect, as the former is by excess. 2. The esteem and value for the object, subsequent to the judgment we form of its possessing such and such excellencies, is not a necessary consequence of that judgment, nor is it always in the same degree in every person; it is an act of the will more than of the understanding, and is always a consequence of, and in proportion to the love and affection we have for the excellencies of which we judge the object to be possessed: Thus, two men equally know all the properties and excellencies of gold, and the many uses for which it can serve; but yet the value and esteem they put upon it is exceedingly different? the one, a miser, whose love and affections are glewed to his treasures, prefers them before every thing else,

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puts the highest value and esteem upon them, yea, is ready to sell his own soul for their sake; the other, whose love and affections are placed upon other kinds of objects, puts very little value upon gold, and parts with it upon any occasion with the greatest ease. A pious Christian and a libertine Deist both know, that a consecrated chalice, for example, is dedicated to the service of Jesus Christ upon his altars; the Christian puts a very high esteem upon it on this account, and treats it with great signs of respect, so as not to dare to touch it irreverently with his naked hand, because the love and esteem he has for Jesus Christ, make him love and respect a thing so nearly connected with him: The Deist, on the other hand, who has no manner of regard for Jesus Christ, and of consequence has no greater esteem, pays no more respect to a chalice consecrated to his service than to one that is not consecrated, and would have as little difficulty to carouse out of it as out of a common wine-glass. In both these examples, and numbers such that might be brought, each person forms the same true judgment that the object possesses certain qualities; but these qualities to the one person are valuable because he loves them; to the other are of little or no value, because he has no affection for them; and of course, though the judgment be the same, the subsequent esteem or value put upon the object, is very different, and in some cases none at all. 3. Such is the frame of

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our constitution, and the nature of that connection between our souls and bodies, that when the soul is any-how strongly affected, it naturally communicates this affection to the body also, raising in it certain outward motions or dispositions which correspond with these inward affections, and are demonstrations of them: Thus, joy, grief, fear, &c. never are in any considerable degree in the soul, but their corresponding signs are immediately excited in the body; and, in like manner, when we have any high esteem or value for any object, this will not fail to show itself, both in our words and actions, towards that object, whenever the proper occasion occurs for so doing. But here it must be observed, that these outward signs of respect or veneration are by no means an immediate consequence, nor even the signs of our knowledge that such and such particular excellencies are in the object, but are always the result of, and in proportion to our love and esteem for these excellencies; for they are the natural expressions of the love and esteem we have for them; and hence, the greater such love and esteem is, the more ardent the external expressions will naturally be.

4. As the excellencies which the various objects about us possess, are very different, and of different kinds; hence, the motive of our respect, which arises from, and is founded on these excellencies, and consequently the respect itself must be of different kinds also. Thus, the motive of our esteem

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and respect for magistrates and princes, is that civil dignity and authority which they possess in the state; this is a civil excellency; and as it is the motive which influences us as citizens to give them the respect and veneration paid them, this veneration or worship, and the outward signs by which we express it, is called *a civil veneration*. The motive of the respect children have for their parents, is that natural power and authority which parents have over them; and as the influence which this motive has on children in making them respect their parents, is the work of nature itself, hence this respect and veneration paid by them to their parents, and all the external expressions of it, is called *a natural respect or veneration*. The motive of the respect we pay to holy persons and holy things, is the connection these have with God; and though this connection in different persons and different things, may be very different, as we have seen above, yet, as they all agree in this general character of being some how or other connected with God and as this connection, of whatever kind it be, is the only motive of our veneration and regard for them, which is a religious motive, hence the respect and veneration we pay to such objects, with all its external expressions, is called *religious respect, religious worship, or religious veneration*. Lastly, The motives of the respect and veneration we pay to God himself, are his own divine perfections, upon account of which,

knowing him to be infinitely above all creatures, and worthy of being infinitely esteemed and beloved by us, we do esteem and respect him above all things whatsoever; and as this motive is totally divine, therefore the worship and veneration we pay to God upon that account, and all its exterior acts by which we express our inward dispositions towards him, are called *divine worship, and acts of divine worship*. 5. It is carefully to be noted, that, sacrifice alone excepted (which, of its own nature, as well as by the common sentiments of all mankind, is an external manifestation of the belief we have of the divine being and his infinite perfections, and of the supreme veneration and worship which we give to him on that account), no other external act of respect whatsoever is in the least degree expressive of the judgment we form concerning the nature of the excellencies in the object to which we pay respect or veneration; and as this judgment is the motive of our respect, and determines the nature of it, it follows, that no external act of respect, except sacrifice, precisely of itself, and abstracting from the circumstances in which it is performed, has any determinate signification of any one kind of worship more than another; but all such external acts are promiscuously used to signify natural, civil, religious, and divine worship, according to the object to whom they are paid. All that these external actions naturally represent is, that we do esteem, respect, and venerate the object

ject to whom we pay them; the more ardently and affectionately we perform them, the more we show the sincerity of our love and respect for the object; but they have no manner of connection with the motive upon which our love and esteem is founded; and therefore, let them be used in ever so ardent a manner, we can never by them alone distinguish what is the internal motive which gives birth to them; nay, as hypocrisy can perfectly well imitate all these exterior signs of the internal affections, they may be used out of mockery and ridicule, as well as out of respect and veneration, as the soldiers did when they bowed the knee before our Saviour and saluted him, *Hail, King of the Jews*. Now this is an observation which deserves a particular attention; because, for want of this, it is that the adversaries of the Catholic Church so obstinately persist in laying to her charge the most uncharitable and unjustifiable accusations of idolatry and superstition; for seeing the ardent and affectionate manner in which her children perform many outward acts of respect and esteem for holy relicks, and for the pictures and images of Jesus Christ and his saints, immediately conclude from this, that they look upon these things as gods, and pay them the worship due to God alone; than which conclusion nothing can be more unjust and unreasonable: These outward acts show, indeed, the sincerity of their love and regard for these objects, and for the persons with whom



they are related, but by no means show the judgment they form of the nature of those excellencies for which they love them; this can only be known by their own declaration; and since they, upon all occasions, both in their books and conversations, do constantly declare their judgment of these objects to be quite the reverse of what is laid to their charge, it is ridiculous in the highest degree, as well as extremely condemnable so to accuse them.

XXII. After this clear and minute explication of the complex idea contained under these words, *respect, worship, veneration*, and such like, it will be an easy matter to determine the question under consideration, *to wit*, Whether any respect or veneration may lawfully be given to holy persons and holy things, and in particular to those which the divine wisdom is pleased to use as his instruments in working miracles, or in bestowing any particular favour or benefit on man? We need only apply the above observations, and particularly the rule there mentioned, and we will immediately see the justness of these following conclusions: 1. That all holy persons, places, and things, deserve, and ought to be judged holy, according to the sense we have given of the word, *viz.* as separated from other creatures and common uses, and united with God by some one or other of those kinds of union above explained.

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2. That, in consequence of this, they are in themselves more valuable, and deserve a higher esteem, and that a greater respect and veneration should be paid them than other persons, places, or things of the same kind, which have not such union or connection with the Deity : Because these holy objects, besides what they have in common with others of the same kind, which puts them all upon an equal footing, have moreover that union and connection with God, which places them in a higher sphere, and renders them much more respectable than those that want it. 3. That, therefore, actually to have that esteem for them in our heart, and to show it outwardly by such words and actions as are expressive thereof, is not only lawful, but a debt strictly due to these objects, seeing they actually do possess these excellencies of separation from other creatures and union with the Creator, which justly deserve to be so valued and esteemed. 4. That, however, as their union with God is the only motive on which this superior veneration is grounded, it therefore follows, that the honour and respect paid to them ultimately terminates in God; and is, strictly speaking, an act of worship paid to him.

XXIII. All these conclusions are not only clear and evident from what has been said, but are in fact the very voice and language of nature itself. For, let us suppose that any human creature of  
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common sense, and with the common feelings of humanity, had in his possession Elijah's mantle, or the handkerchiefs and aprons which had touched the body of St Paul; and that the same miracles had been wrought in himself or others by their means while in his possession, which are recorded in the holy scriptures to have been wrought by them in former days, would that person pay no more regard, or put no greater value upon these objects than upon any others of the same kind? would not nature itself dictate to him, without the help of reasoning, to value and esteem them above treasures of gold and silver? would he not, both in words and actions, as occasions served, show this his esteem and veneration for them? certainly he would; and let any man ask his own heart what he would do if it were his case, and, I dare say, it would give him the same answer. When the people of God were stung by the fiery serpents, and found an immediate remedy of their mortal bite by only looking at the brazen serpent set up by command of God for this purpose, with what respect, with what reverence, with what veneration must they have regarded that image? we need only examine our own hearts what we would have done, to know what they did on this occasion. So true it is, that once we know a thing to be connected with Almighty God, and much more if he has used it as an instrument of bestowing any extraordinary favour on man, if we have any sense of



of religion in our souls, and be not warped from the dictates of nature by passion or prejudice, we naturally, and without reflection, conceive in our hearts a high esteem and religious veneration for it, which as naturally manifests itself outwardly in our words and actions.

XXIV. I cannot omit here citing, by the bye, the authority of one, in proof of what is said above, who, all the world knows, is no friend to Popery or miracles; I mean the celebrated Dr Middleton: The Observator, one of the Doctor's antagonists, had advanced, that *if God works a cure by dead men's bones, it does not follow that the bones are to be worshipped*; if this gentleman means that such bones are not to be worshipped as gods, nor divine honour paid them, no body but a fool will dispute the point with him; for no Christian in his senses ever made such a conclusion; but if he means that, in the case proposed, no kind of respect, no veneration, no sort of worship at all, even such as is above explained, is to be given these bones, all the above reasonings, and the voice of nature itself cry out against him; of which Dr Middleton is so sensible, that in his remarks on the Observator (page 23.), he answers with warmth to the above assertion; *but in fact, it immediately did follow, has—and must follow, in confusion of his silly hypothesis.*

XXV. But

XXV. But we are under no necessity of having recourse to the testimony of a Middleton, in confirmation of what is above advanced; the holy scriptures afford us a much more respectable authority to convince us of it; for in these sacred oracles we find repeated instances of the most profound external acts of respect, worship, and veneration paid to holy persons and holy things, both in words and actions, and especially to those whom Almighty God was pleased to use as his instruments in performing miracles. Thus, when Obadiah was sent by Ahab to seek for water, and met the holy prophet Elijah by the way, *he knew him, and fell flat upon his face*, 1 Kings xviii. 7. The sons of the prophets, when they saw Elisha divide the waters of Jordan, and pass through on dry land, said, *the spirit of Elijah doth rest on Elisha; and they came to meet him, and bowed themselves to the ground before him*, 2 Kings ii. 15. After the defeat of the people of God at Ai, *Joshua rent his clothes, and fell to the earth upon his face* BEFORE THE ARK OF THE LORD *until the even tide, he and the elders of Israel, and put dust upon their heads*, Jos. vii. 6. See here how profound an external act of worship is paid to the ark, an inanimate creature! In the days of Samuel, when the Israelites were defeated the first time by the Philistines, they said, *Let us fetch the ark of the covenant of the Lord out of Shiloh unto us, that when it cometh among us it MAY SAVE US out of the hands of our enemies*, 1 Sam. iv. 3. Here

we find the saving the people attributed to the ark in scripture language; and, to omit other examples of this kind, I shall only add, that to shew us that all such religious worship paid to holy persons and holy things was approved of, and agreeable to God, and even required by him, we need only recall what has been said of the miraculous punishments inflicted by God on those who failed in this duty. See above, chap. vi. § xiv. &c. From all which then we justly conclude, "that it is most consonant to right reason, agreeable to the voice and dictates of nature, required by Almighty God, and the neglect of it punished by him, that a due esteem and religious veneration be paid, for his sake, to all holy persons and holy things, especially such as he is pleased to make use of as instruments of manifesting his own glory, and promoting the good of man, in working miracles."

XXVI. Before I leave this subject of the instruments used by Almighty God in performing miracles, it will be proper to examine a question that naturally occurs here, *to wit*, Whether he at any time makes use of wicked men as his instruments for this purpose? That those who are servants of God, in high favour with him, and honoured with the gift of miracles, may, after all this, fall even into the most grievous sins, is not called in question. St Peter was sent with his fellow apostles to cure the sick, cast out devils, and to do other wonderful



ful things, and yet we know how he afterwards fell into a dreadful crime: Neither do we enquire here whether wicked men, by the agency of evil spirits, may sometimes perform prodigies and surprising things; this is readily granted; the scripture is clear upon it; but such prodigies are by no means true miracles, but lying signs and wonders; neither are such men instruments in the hands of God in performing these miracles, but instruments in the hand of the devil. But what we are here to enquire is, Whether Almighty God, at any time, makes use of wicked men, who openly live bad lives, and whilst they are in a state of enmity with him, as his instruments by whom to work real miracles? and in what manner, or on what grounds he does so? In order to be able to form a just and exact judgment in this matter, I shall first consider such examples as we find in the holy scriptures relating thereto, and then see what light they give us in this question.

XXVII. The first we meet with is that of Baalam. Interpreters are not unanimous in their opinions concerning this man, whether he really was a prophet of the most high God, tho' a wicked man, or if he was, and always had been a magician or soothsayer. Some few are of the former opinion, but the generality of the fathers, and most celebrated interpreters, as far as I have had occasion to know, look upon him as having  
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always been an impious magician as well as a most wicked man. However this be, it cannot be called in question, that if ever he had been a servant of God, and a prophet of his, he was not so when sent for by the king of Moab, as the scripture expressly calls him then a *soothsayer*, Jos. xiii. 22. and his building seven altars, and ordering a set number of victims on each, were acts of idolatry and superstition, done on the high places of Baal, in his honour, and seeking knowledge from him by such enchantments. Hence, Num. xxiv. ver. 1. they are expressly called enchantments, and Balaam is said to have given them up out of despair; because instead of meeting what he wanted from them, he found God always opposed him, and was determined to bless Israel; and besides, wherever he is mentioned in other parts of scripture, he is always spoken of with horror and detestation, as one of the worst of men: See 2 Pet. ii. 14, 15. and Jude ver. 11. And yet we find that he not only was inspired by God to pronounce a solemn benediction upon the people of Israel, but also to make a most solemn prophecy of the Messiah, and to foretell the future fate of several of the people in that country.

The next example that occurs is that of Saul, of whom we are told, that not only when he was in friendship with God and innocent, he was filled with a prophetic spirit, and prophesied with the other prophets, as related, 1 Sam. x. 10. but al-

so afterwards when he was cast off by God for his sins; nay, when he was in the very resolution to kill David, an innocent person, and had sent several parties for that purpose, and afterwards went to do it himself, that not only the people he had sent, but also he himself, when he went, was at that very time filled with the prophetic spirit and prophesied, 1 Sam. xix. 23.

The third example is that of Judas, who, tho' *he was a thief*, John xii. 6. and that Christ knew from the beginning that he *should betray him*, John vi. 64. yea, upon a certain occasion said of him that he was a devil; *Have I not chosen you twelve, and one of you is a devil?* now *he spake of Judas Iscariot*, John vi. 70. Yet notwithstanding all this he sent him out with the rest on their mission, and gave him, as well as them, the power of working miracles, of which the gospel gives this account: *And when he had called unto him his twelve disciples, he gave them power against unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all manner of sickness, and all manner of diseases—and he commanded them, saying, heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out devils, &c.* Matth. x. 1. &c.

The fourth example is of Caiaphas, who, though a most wicked man, and at that very time plotting the destruction of Jesus Christ, yet even then prophesied



phesied the necessity of his death for the salvation of the whole world.

Besides, our blessed Saviour himself says expressly, *Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? and then I shall profess to them I never knew you; depart from me, ye that work iniquity, Matth. vii. 22.*

Lastly, St Paul evidently supposes the power of working miracles even in wicked men void of charity, when he says, *Though I should have all faith so as to remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing, 1 Cor. xiii.*

XXVIII. Let us now consider and examine these several examples and passages of scripture, and see what conclusion can be drawn from them; and first, with regard to Balaam, nothing is more common in the holy scripture than to find Almighty God turning the impiety of wicked men against themselves, either for the more effectual convincing them of their error, or for the greater exaltation of his servants; and in these cases, as the royal prophet says, *He bringeth the counsel of the heathen to nought, and maketh the devices of the people of none effect, Psal. xxxiii. 10.* In the case before us Balak wanted Balaam by his enchantments to

imprecate ruin and destruction on the people of God; Balaam was most desirous of complying with the king's request, and accordingly had recourse to his charms and incantations for this purpose; but Almighty God, whose chosen people Israel was, interposed in their behalf, disappointed all the effects of Balaam's enchantments, and instead of allowing the devil to assist him as he wished for, sent his own angel in his place to let Balaam know the impossibility of what he desired, to reprove his avarice and impiety, and to put words in his mouth concerning Israel quite the reverse of what Balak wanted, for *the Lord put a word in Balaam's mouth, and said, RETURN UNTO BALAK, AND THUS THOU SHALT SPEAK*, Numb. xxiii. 5. And again, when a second attempt was made, *The Lord met Balaam, and put a word in his mouth, and said, go again unto Balak, and speak thus*, ver. 16. Now these words which the angel here put in his mouth, were not only a solemn benediction of Israel, but also a prediction of what was to be done in future ages by their posterity, against the people of Balak and their neighbours, who had joined with him against the people of God, in just punishment of their impiety; for in the place where that prediction is made, as well as in the last benediction of Israel, Balaam declares, that what he is about to say are the words that he had heard; *He hath said, which heard the words of God, which saw the vision of the Almighty, &c.* chap. xxiv. ver. 4. And again, *he hath said,*  
*which*

*which heard the words of God, and knew the knowledge of the Most High, which saw the visions of the Almighty, ver. 16.* From these observations it would appear, that Balaam was not properly God's instrument in working a miracle, but rather the subject on whom the miracle was wrought, being forced by God, in direct opposition to his own will and desire, to bless the people of God, and to relate the evils that were to come upon these nations in after-ages, as the angel had declared to him, in punishment of Balak for his evil mind against God's people; and consequently it cannot be drawn from this example, that Almighty God ever makes use of wicked men living openly in disgrace with him as instruments of working miracles.

XXIX. With regard to Saul, it must be observed, 1<sup>st</sup>, That the word prophecy does not always in scripture imply the foretelling things to come, nor by prophets is always understood those who foretell such things; but by prophets is often meant those who are deputed to sing the praises of God, or sets of religious men who lived together by themselves, and were employed in that office, and who celebrated the divine praises both by their voices and various kinds of musical instruments; the hill of God, where Saul met with a company of these men, was probably so called from their residing on it; and Samuel foretold him that

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he would there meet them with psaltery, and pipe, and harp before them, 1 Sam. x. 5. This will further appear by what is related, 1 Chron. xv. 16. 17. *And David spake to the chief of the Levites to appoint their brethren to be singers with instruments of music, psalteries, and harps, and cymbals, sounding, by lifting up the voice with joy. So the Levites appointed Heman the son of Joel, and of his brethren Asaph the son of Berechiah.* Now this employment of their's is in another scripture expressly called prophesying; thus, chap. xxv. 1. *Moreover, David and the captains of the host separated to the service of the sons of Asaph, and of Heman, and of Jeduthun, who should PROPHECY WITH HARPS, AND PSALTERIES, AND CYMBALS:* And again, ver. 2. of the sons of Asaph, it is said, that they were under the hands of Asaph, which prophesied according to the order of the king; where it is evident that the word *prophecy* cannot mean the foretelling future things, which neither the king could command, nor any one do at his command, but must signify the celebrating the praises of God for which they were appointed. Hence then we may observe, 2dly, That when Saul met with a company of these holy men, and is said to have prophesied with them, it is only meant that Almighty God filled him with an extraordinary affection of piety and devotion, which made him forget all worldly concerns, and join these good people in singing the praises of God, as it were in an extatic manner,

manner, as they did, in which there was certainly no miracle wrought by Saul; but if it was miraculous at all, the miracle was done in him by the change which the Holy Ghost wrought in his heart, and which is not more wonderful than what is done every day, in the conversion of wicked men to a good life. We must observe, 3<sup>dly</sup>, That as the second time this happened to Saul was when he was in a sinful state, and actually in the very resolution of committing a most grievous sin, so the whole conduct of Almighty God on this occasion shows both the infinite care which he has over his servants, and his earnest desire for the conversion of sinners, which were the ends he had in view in what happened. Saul being determined upon the death of David, no sooner heard that he was at Najoth with Samuel and the prophets, than he sent a party to take him; but immediately upon their arrival they were filled with devotion, and forgetting the message given them by the king, joined with the rest and prophesied, *that is*, sung the praises of God; the king hearing this, sent a second and a third party, to whom the same thing happened in like manner; here Almighty God manifested his power to Saul, which ought to have convinced him how vain it was for him to fight against God, or think to destroy David, whom God protected, and had decreed should succeed him in the kingdom; but Saul, blinded by his passion, never thought of that, but went himself in person to  
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have David destroyed ; but when he came nigh the place, God was pleased to work the same change in him, and even in a more extraordinary manner than in his guards, by divesting him for a time of all his fury against David, and exciting him to join the rest in celebrating the divine praises. From all which it is evident, that whatever there was of miraculous in this change, Saul was only the subject on whom it was wrought ; and as his prophesying did not consist in foretelling things to come, which would indeed be miraculous, but only in singing the praises of God, so it is plain, he was by no means made use of by Almighty God as an instrument of working any miracle at all, in the sense in which we have explained that word, and in which it is naturally understood.

XXX. The next case mentioned above is that of Judas, concerning whom it is certain, *1mo*, That he was at last a most impious man, and died a reprobate ; *2do*, That, Jesus Christ knew from the beginning what he was to do, and how he was to die ; *3tio*, That, in conjunction with the other apostles, he received the commission and power of working miracles when he was sent along with them to preach the approach of the kingdom of heaven, and prepare the people for receiving our blessed Saviour, and there is no reason to doubt but that he exercised that power as well as the rest of his brethren. So far then is certain



certain concerning him ; but it does not appear evident from the sacred writings, that Judas was actually a bad man, living a bad life, and at enmity with God, when he was called by Jesus Christ to the apostleship, and received on that occasion the power of working miracles ; for they were sent on their mission with that power, according to the sacred chronologists, very soon after their vocation ; and consequently all that can be concluded with certainty from his case, is, that though he was used by God as an instrument in working miracles, yet he afterwards became a reprobate ; but it is by no means certain that he actually was a bad man, and in disgrace with God when he received and exercised that power ; nay, it seems much more reasonable to conclude, that at first he was not a bad man, whatever way he afterwards turned, as it is scarce to be supposed that Jesus Christ would have chosen an actually bad living man, and raised him up to so high a dignity as an apostle, and bestowed such powers upon him ; at least if he was then a wicked man, it must only have been in the dispositions of his heart, and not at all in his outward conduct and actions ; for no such thing is laid to his charge in the gospel ; and as our Saviour's enemies made such a reproach to him that he kept company with publicans and sinners, they undoubtedly would have cried out much more against him, had one of his own disciples been of that kind : All that follows then from the case of Judas in this supposition,

position, is, that the ministers of the church, whose office is to preach the gospel, acting in that quality, may receive the power of working miracles, when the confirmation of their mission, or of the truths they preach, requires it, for the good of others, whilst they themselves live without reproach in the eyes of the world, even though they should be bad men in their hearts, and in the sight of God, and end at last in reprobation.

XXXI. The case of Caiaphas comes next to be considered, which is thus related in the gospel: *Then gathered the chief priests and the Pharisees a council, and said, what do we? for this man doth many miracles: If we let him thus alone, all men will believe in him, and the Romans shall come and take away both our place and nation: And one of them named Caiaphas, being the high-priest that same year, said unto them, You know nothing at all, nor consider that it is expedient for us, that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not: And this spake he not of himself, but being high-priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus should die for that nation, &c. John xi. 47. &c.* Now, from this account of the gospel, it appears at first sight, imo, That what Caiaphas said was, in its natural signification, a consequence of the preceding deliberation of the council, and the wicked dispositions of all their hearts against Jesus Christ; all alledged the danger of letting him alone, both  
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for themselves and their nation : Caiaphas therefore concluded, that it was expedient he should die. 2<sup>do</sup>, That Caiaphas himself had no knowledge of the prophetic sense of his words, and was exceeding far from intending them. 3<sup>tio</sup>, That the Holy Ghost prompted him to express his opinion in such words, as might at the same time signify both what he maliciously intended against our Saviour, and what Almighty God designed, in foretelling his death for the salvation of mankind. 4<sup>to</sup>, That this was done solely in consequence of his character of high-priest, and not out of regard to his person : For as the holy fathers in general explain it, *Prophetia donum eo tempore non homini, sed sacerdotio concessit Deus.* 5<sup>to</sup>, That it does not appear from the scripture that Caiaphas was at this time a bad man as to his moral character in the eyes of the people, nor looked upon in that light by them ; for the horrid crime he was guilty of with regard to Jesus Christ was proposed to the people as zeal for the cause of God, and for his law. 6<sup>to</sup>, That of consequence Caiaphas, a wicked man, and open enemy of Jesus Christ, was no more an instrument in the hand of God in pronouncing this prophecy, than the ass was in pronouncing Balaam's correction and reproof ; *that is*, was nothing but a mere material instrument. From all which, however, it follows, that the sacred character of the priesthood may be a sufficient motive to induce Almighty God to make use of his ministers as instruments



ments in working miracles for his own glory, or the good of others, even though they be wicked men themselves in his sight, but while their wickedness does not appear in the eyes of the world.

XXXII. If now we take a view of what our Saviour says, Matth. vii. 22. *That many shall say unto him in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name, &c.?* we will easily see all that can be gathered from it; for we must observe, that though these people have died in disgrace with God, and will be for ever cut off from him, notwithstanding they had in their life-time wrought miracles in his name; yet the scripture does not say that they were actually wicked men and open sinners when they wrought these miracles; their having done these miracles in his name, shows they had the true faith, and were members of his church; and we find, from the example of the sons of Scæva, that those who have not the true faith, and are not members of the church, though they pretend to work miracles in the name of Jesus Christ, not only cannot perform any, but expose themselves to no small danger by attempting it; see Acts xix. 13. *et seqq.* Now, if those our Saviour here speaks of had the true faith, and if there appears nothing in scripture to prove they were actually vicious men when they wrought these miracles, we may charitably suppose they were then

then good men, although afterwards they fell into sin, and died reprobate and impenitent; and, in this supposition, our Saviour's words have their full force, in shewing us, that true piety, such as will bring us to heaven, does not consist either in any outward excercises of devotion alone, such as prayer, which he declares in the preceding verse, when he says, *Not every one that says to me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven*; nor even in any extraordinary graces of those called *gratis data*, to wit, which are given not for the sanctification of those who have them, but for the good of others, such as the gift of miracles; for that many who have had those gifts will at last be damned; but that it consists in doing *the will of God in all things*; for, *he that does the will of my Father which is in heaven, he shall enter into the kingdom of heaven*. It is true, indeed, the answer which our Saviour tells us he will give to those people, is, *I never knew you*; which seems to imply that they had always been bad men; but this consequence is not just; for as it is certain that they had the true faith of Christ and were Christians, they must have some time or other been in the state of grace and friendship with God, at least after baptism, and till they had lost their baptismal innocence; besides, it appears even to give a shock to piety, to suppose that Jesus Christ would make use of many as instruments in his hand of working so many and great miracles as are here mentioned,

who had always been impious men and his enemies; wherefore the words *I never knew you* can only signify that knowledge of approbation and love which Jesus Christ has of those whom he foresees will, by persevering in his favour, be his for ever; of such he says, *My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me, and I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish.* John x. 27. 28. With this knowledge it is certainly true, that Christ never knew those that perish, though in their former life they had been far advanced in perfection, and even so as to work miracles and prophecy. What I have here advanced tends only to shew, that if we only consider the words of scripture as they lie in the passage we have before us, there does not appear any certainty from it that those of whom our Saviour here speaks were actually in the state of sin, much less that they were openly wicked men, when they performed the miracles here related; and consequently, that this passage is not a full and direct proof that God ever does make use of such wicked men as instruments in working miracles.

XXXIII. The last passage from St Paul, where he says, *Though I should have all faith, so as to remove mountains, I am nothing,* 1 Cor. xiii. plainly supposes, that that strong faith on which the gift of miracles is founded, may be in such as are void of charity, and in disgrace with God; and in this sense it



it is commonly understood by the holy fathers and sacred interpreters.

XXXIV. To come now to the application of all the above reflections, we must observe two distinct questions: *1mo*, As to the possibility, whether the gift of miracles can be bestowed on wicked men, who live open bad lives, in disgrace with God? *2do*, As to the fact, whether Almighty God does actually sometimes make use of such by whom to work miracles?

XXXV. With regard to the first question, the solution is very easy; the power of miracles is a free gift of God, not due to any merit on the part of him who receives it, not necessary for his own immediate sanctification, nor given for that end, but for the good of others, for the manifestation and confirmation of the truth; and therefore, there appears no reason to suppose, that this power cannot be in certain circumstances bestowed even on wicked men; that is, that Almighty God may not, if he pleases, work true miracles, even by means of wicked men, when his own glory and the good of souls can be promoted thereby: Some of the above texts of scripture strongly insinuate that this may be sometimes done, and the holy fathers and all the interpreters grounded upon these texts, unanimously acknowledged it. But as to the second question, to wit, *Whether Almighty God in fact*

does make use of wicked men, known to be such, as his instruments in working miracles? To this I answer, *1mo*, That according to the ordinary course of the laws of providence, this is seldom, very seldom, if ever, the case. *2do*, That there is scarce one positive proof from scripture, that this in fact is ever done. *3tio*, That there are several very strong reasons of congruency which shew why God (except in some very singular and extraordinary circumstances) should not do so. Now these reasons are, first, because true miracles not only convince us of the truth of that doctrine in proof of which they are performed, but also naturally impress in the mind a strong sense of veneration for the person who performs them, and persuades us of his power with God. Now it does not seem very congruous to the divine wisdom and goodness, to bestow upon persons openly vicious a gift which naturally tends to make others esteem and reverence them as his friends. Secondly, the gift of miracles naturally procures authority to the person who has it; and therefore, were it bestowed on men openly wicked, even in only one or a few instances, it might give them a handle, by afterwards appealing to these to impose upon *the many*, and lead them on to wickedness. Thirdly, the openly known vicious lives of wicked men, could not fail to detract exceedingly from the authority of any miracles performed by them, and leave a strong suspicion in the mind that their miracles were not true,

true, but either fictitious or the work of Satan, and not of God; for as miracles give a double lustre to virtue and sanctity, so a holy and virtuous life exceedingly confirms and enhances the authority of miracles; and it does not seem very congruous, that the divine wisdom should, except in some very extraordinary instance, deprive miracles of the great advantage and force they receive from the sanctity of the person who performs them; and which makes them the more effectually procure the ends intended by them. I answer, *1<sup>to</sup>*, That if at any time Almighty God makes use of wicked men to perform miracles, this is only done in as far as can be drawn from scripture in the examples of Judas and Caiaphas, under the following conditions; when the person performing the miracle is, *1<sup>mo</sup>*, himself a true believer, though a wicked man; for, if not a true believer, no miracle will be performed, tho' attempted even in the name of Jesus, as we see in the sons of Scæva: *2<sup>do</sup>*, Adorned with the character of a public minister of God, as Judas and Caiaphas were; and then the power is granted to the character, not the person, as is expressly taken notice of in the case of Caiaphas: *3<sup>to</sup>*, That though wicked men in the sight of God, yet that they do not appear as such in the eyes of the world; for, as we have seen above, there seems no proof from scripture, that any such were ever used by God as instruments of working miracles: *4<sup>to</sup>*, When the end of these miracles is solely to confirm or discover the truths of God.



## CHAP. IX.

*On the AUTHORITY of MIRACLES.*

I. **W**E are now come to treat of a subject which is of the highest importance, and therefore deserves a more particular accuracy and attention. The enemies of the Christian religion leave no means untried, in order to vilify and enervate the force of these arguments which are used in its favours from miracles: From its first commencement they have never failed to raise their batteries against that impregnable fortress, and used every engine in their power to overturn it; but always without success, and generally to their own confusion. Sometimes they have endeavoured to disprove the possibility of miracles; and being foiled there, have attacked their actual existence; finding this would not do, they have had recourse to the vain pretence, that it is impossible to prove their existence; but seeing the fort impregnable on that side also, have sought for shelter to their impiety in the weak plea of denying their authority; vainly pretending, with an air of triumph, that though the existence of miracles should be acknowledged, they can prove nothing;

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nor can the truth of any doctrine be shown from them, both because miracles have been alledged and wrought in proof of opposite doctrines, and also because, according to Christian writers, even those of the first note, the sanctity of the doctrine taught is given as a criterion by which to judge of, and prove the truth of the miracle wrought in its favours. This point therefore must be particularly considered, and the objections brought against the authority of miracles carefully examined. But first I must premise a few observations which will serve to show the true state of the question in its proper point of view, and at the same time to preclude several of the objections themselves.

II. First then, we must observe, that what Mr Hume alledges in his Essay against Miracles, page 182. [in the note], *That a miracle may be discoverable by men or not; but that this alters not its nature or essence*, is not true in the Christian idea of a miracle; for, as a miracle is an *extraordinary effect produced in the material creation*, which material creation is essentially the natural object of our senses, every extraordinary effect produced in it, must of course be in itself *discoverable* by us, whether we in fact do discover it or not. It is true indeed the Christian religion proposes to us several operations proper to Almighty God as objects of our faith, which are not at all discoverable by our senses; such as, *the incarnation of the Son of God;*

*God; the union of the divine and human natures in one person; the conception of Jesus Christ in his mother's womb without her having the knowledge of man, and the like: But it is certain that the Christian world never looked upon these as miracles in the ordinary and proper sense of that word; and if we consider them attentively, we shall find that they can no more be classed with miracles than the creation of the world at the beginning, or the daily creation of the soul of man and uniting it to the body. These also are operations of the almighty hand of God, above the power of all created agents to perform; but it is plain they do not enter into our idea of a miracle. The above truths do not fall under our senses; we know them only by revelation; they are the objects of our faith, the mysteries which the Christian religion proposes to our belief, but not miracles. However, if Mr Hume or any other chuses to call them miracles, I have no objection; but such kind of miracles can have no authority as proofs; their revelation and reality must be proved itself along with the other truths of Christianity, by miracles properly such, according to the explication we have given of them; miracles which are of their own nature discoverable by men, and fall under our senses.*

*Secondly, If the miracle proposed be evidently a relative miracle, or such as can be performed by creatures of a superior nature to man, whether*

*good*



good or bad ; or if there be any solid reason to suspect it is so, or that it may perhaps be only the effect of natural causes ; such a miracle can never serve as a proof of any doctrine, without further evidence ; nor make that impressiion upon the mind which the persuation of its being a true miracle naturally and necessarily does ; because the suspiciion in this case must always remain in the mind ; *perhaps the thing done is owing to natural causes, and is no miracle at all ; perhaps it is the work of Satan, and not of God.* It is therefore only such miracles as are known to be from God, and performed either by himself, or by his holy angels, commissioned and authoris'd by him to do so, that can be used as having authority in proof of any doctrine.

*Thirdly,* We have seen above, that true miracles, by a certain natural but powerful efficacy, make a deep impressiion on the mind, excite a more lively sense of the divine presence, and produce several other valuable effects in the hearts both of those who receive benefit by them, and of those who come to know them, such as veneration and reverence towards God, love and gratitude for the favours received, confidence in his goodness, fear of offending, and the like : Now the present inquiry is not how far, or by what means miracles are capable of producing these affections in the heart of man ; this is a fact which is known by experience.

perience, and is not called in question; but, as we have seen above that some of the principal ends intended by Almighty God from miracles were to convince mankind of the divine commission of those whom he sends to inform them of his will, or to prove that the doctrine proposed by such teachers is divine doctrine, or to defend any tenet formerly revealed and believed to be from God, when at any time afterwards it comes to be denied or called in question; hence the present inquiry is precisely this, *how far true miracles are a sufficient and rational proof to convince the world of the truth of any of these three points, and how great authority they have for this purpose?*

*Fourthly,* With regard to the nature of the doctrine to be proved by miracles, we must carefully observe, that this kind of proof is not intended to convey a clear and distinct idea of the different parts of the doctrine proposed, or of their mutual connections and relations with one another, as in the case with those proofs which are drawn from the internal evidence of any doctrine; nay, strictly speaking, the authority of the proof drawn from miracles does not fall directly upon the doctrine itself, but precisely and immediately falls upon its revelation; for the immediate object which this kind of proof has in view is to show that the doctrine proposed is revealed by God. The truth of the doctrine, however, is no less certain on this account,

account, but rather more so, because, as it is absolutely impossible, and evidently repugnant to the very idea we have of God, to suppose that he can ever assert, authorize or propagate a falsehood, so if the authority of miracles can prove, to full conviction, that the doctrine attested by them is the doctrine of God, and revealed by him, it must follow as an incontestible consequence, that that doctrine is essentially true.

*Fifthly,* All those natural truths which can be known and proved by the light of reason, and which the human understanding is capable of comprehending, do not stand in need of being revealed by God to convince mankind that they are true; and therefore neither are they, strictly speaking, the proper objects of this proof from miracles. I do not say that Almighty God may not, if he pleases, make even natural truths the subject of revelation, to discover them to mankind more clearly than natural unassisted reason can do, or to give us a greater conviction and certainty of them; but that, strictly speaking, they do not stand in need of this proof in order to convince mankind of their reality; but the proper objects of this proof from miracles, are either such supernatural truths as exceed the comprehension of the mind of man, and are absolutely incapable of being known to us but by revelation, or of being proved to exist by any natural reason; or they are positive institutions of  
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the divine will requiring something from us, which depending solely on the divine pleasure, it is impossible we should have any idea of them except he make them known to us.

III. From these observations the precise state of the present question about the authority of miracles naturally flows: For here we see that the miracles required in this proof are only such as are certainly from God, either performed immediately by himself or by commission from him; and this at once cuts off all objections from miracles having been performed in proof of opposite doctrines, as it is evidently impossible that God can perform miracles in attestation of falsehood; and therefore, in such a contest, as was the case between Moses and the Egyptian magicians, the miracles on the one side cannot be from God, and therefore not true miracles, but *lying signs of Satan*, by which none need be deceived but such as are willing to be so: For Almighty God is bound by his own sanctity and divine perfections to hinder such delusions from being undiscoverable, as we shall see at large when explaining the criterion. From the above observations we also see what kind of doctrines stand in need of this proof from miracles; and these are either the divine commission of such as are sent by God to communicate his will to man, or such supernatural truths concerning God and spiritual things, as are in themselves incomprehensible to

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the human understanding, and undiscoverable by natural reason; or, in fine, such positive institutions as God may be pleased to appoint, and wants we should receive and observe; and this obviates the objections from the incomprehensibility of the doctrine, since it is chiefly such doctrine as stands in need of this proof: Wherefore the precise state of the question is, *Whether miracles known to be performed by God, or by angels commissioned by him, in order to prove any of these points, be a just and rational proof to convince mankind, that they are in reality the truths of God, and revealed by him?* This is the Subject of our present inquiry, and the light of reason, as well as the Christian religion, clearly shews, that such miracles as we have mentioned are a full convincing and irrefragable proof of the divine revelation of the doctrines for which they are wrought, and oblige all those to whom these doctrines are so proved, to receive them as divine truths stamped with the seal of heaven, and attested by God himself.

IV. I begin by considering what the light of reason teaches us concerning this: The principles by which our reason is guided in this matter are taken from the very idea we have of the supreme Being, as a Being of infinite perfections; from this we evidently see, that if God be infinitely good, it is impossible he can directly concur or employ his almighty power in defence of a lie, to the in-

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evitable delusion of his rational creatures, whom he loves so much, and whose happiness he has so much at heart: If he be infinitely true and holy, it is impossible he should ever attest, authorize, or propagate lies and falsehood: he must essentially love truth, and this love of truth must be incompatible with the love of a lie: If he be infinitely wise, he can never act against himself, either by employing his power against his own veracity, holiness, or wisdom; or by depriving himself of the most apt external means of convincing mankind of whatever he thinks proper to make known to them of his will. These are principles which are evident to the light of reason, and essentially connected with our idea of a supreme and infinitely perfect Being. Now, to come to our case, let us suppose that a person appears in the world, declaring that he is sent from this supreme Being, and commissioned by him to instruct mankind in his divine will, and appeals to God himself to attest his being thus sent and commissioned by him: In this case, how is it possible for Almighty God to give the attestation required so as fully to satisfy his rational creatures, and exclude all suspicion of delusion? It is plain, there are no external means by which he can do so, but by exerting his omnipotence and performing miracles: And it is no less evident, that this attestation he never can give, if the person who appeals to it in proof of his being sent by God, be not in fact sent and commissioned by



by him : Miracles in such a case as this, are the voice of God attesting that what his servant says is true ; they are the broad seal of heaven authenticating the commission given by God to those whom he sends as his ambassadors to men, and which a God of goodness and truth can never possibly give where the commission is not true and real. Let us suppose again, that this person proposes a doctrine formerly unheard and unknown, but which he pretends he had by revelation from God, with orders to teach it to men, and appeals again to the same divine attestation in proof that it was so : It is evident, that if this new doctrine was not revealed to him by God, it is impossible God should ever work any miracle in attestation of its being so ; for this, as well as in the former case, would evidently be to attest a lie, to authorize a falsehood, to exert his power against his own sanctity, and thereby positively concur to the deception and delusion of his creatures ; and, in fine, render precarious and useless the only proper external means of convincing mankind of what he requires of them. Let us suppose, in the third place, that any received point of doctrine believed to have been originally revealed by God, is called in question and denied, and that, in defence of its revelation, appeal is made to God, as in the two preceding cases, to attest it by miracles ; it is clear as noon-day, that if it was not revealed, Almighty God never will, nor ever can give the required at-

testation of its being so, without falling into the self-same absurd consequences as above : From all which it evidently appears, that if it be known that Almighty God works a miracle, in order to attest either the commission of his servants, or the revelation of the doctrines they propose or defend, that this must be a full and absolute proof of the veracity of the commission, and of the revelation of the doctrine : And observe, that though the divine attestation by miracles should be denied, which may sometimes happen, as we shall afterwards see more fully in the last of the three suppositions above-mentioned ; and though this denial, considered merely in itself, is not a full proof that the contested doctrine is false, because God is not always obliged to work miracles when required, in defence of doctrines which have been formerly sufficiently revealed ; yet, when he is pleased, in any of the above cases, actually to work the miracle in attestation of the doctrine, it is then absolutely impossible, and utterly inconsistent with the divine perfections, that the doctrines so attested should not be from God ; and consequently, *the authority of miracles in proof of doctrine, as above explained, is absolute and conclusive.* All the above reasoning may be well illustrated by a parallel case among men. When a person is sent as an ambassador from one king to another, he must have his credentials properly authenticated before he can be received in that character by the king to whom he is sent:

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This is done by a commission signed and sealed by the king his master, and importing, that he is sent and authorized by him to declare his mind to the other king concerning the affairs to be treated between them, and requiring all due regard to be had to what he shall so declare: These credentials are an absolute proof that this ambassador is actually sent and commissioned by his master, and procures all necessary credit to what he says in his master's name. But as there is a possibility that an ambassador so commissioned may sometimes go beyond his commission, and do or say things in his master's name for which he is not authorized by him; if he should at any time make some very extraordinary (and in appearance most unreasonable) demand, the credentials he has first shown will not so far give a sanction to his words, but that on such an occasion his veracity may be called in question; if therefore upon this he should produce another commission, signed and sealed as the former, and actually authorizing him to make the said demand in his master's name; this will effectually secure him from all suspicion of fraud, and prove to conviction, that his demand, however extraordinary or unreasonable, was not an invention of his own, but expressly enjoined him by the king his master. The application to our case is perfectly obvious; God Almighty makes choice of some faithful servant to whom he reveals his will, and sends him as his ambassador to declare the same to men;



he appears among them, declares his commission from God, and appeals to the miracles which God works by his means, and at his desire, as the credentials of his mission, as proofs of his being sent by him : These miracles, therefore, are the signature of God, the seal of heaven, by which this person's commission is authenticated, and which necessarily procures to himself a due veneration as to an ambassador from God, and a just credit and regard to all he says. But we shall suppose that, among the doctrines he teaches, he at last proposes some things very extraordinary, and not only hitherto unheard of, but which appear incomprehensible, and seemingly contradictory, which however he declares he received from God, and to which he requires their entire submission : They are at a stand, they hesitate, they begin to suspect. " He is sent from " God (say they), we cannot doubt of it ; but he " is a man, and perhaps in these things goes beyond his orders ; it is true, it does not seem consistent with the goodness of God to give his divine attestation to prove that any teacher is sent by him to the world, and yet permit him, under the sanction of his character, to teach falsehood ; but, on the other hand, though this man has proved beyond dispute that he is sent by God to declare his will to man, yet these points he proposes are so shocking, and in appearance so contrary to common sense, that we know not what to think of the matter." If, to assuage their fears,

fears, and extricate them out of this dilemma, their teacher should produce another commission of the self-same nature as the former, signed and sealed like it with the finger of God; that is, if he should again have recourse to miracles to attest that these very points at which they startle were actually revealed by God to him, and if God should accordingly work the miracles demanded for that purpose, this must immediately dissolve all their doubts, and effectually convince them, not only that this person was sent from God, but that these very incomprehensible doctrines which he teaches were the truths of God, revealed by him to his servant, and which therefore it is their bounden duty to receive with all submission and veneration. In fact, we find this is the very thing that Almighty God has done; Jesus Christ appears in Judea and gives himself out as a teacher sent by God; yea, as the great Prophet so long expected to be the Saviour of the world: St John the Baptist being then in prison, and hearing of his fame, sends two of his disciples to enquire if he was the Messias; the answer he gives them, is an appeal to his credentials sealed by Almighty God, viz. the numberless miracles he daily wrought, against which there could be no reply. Among the other doctrines he taught, one article was, that he, as man, had received power from God to forgive sins upon earth; and he takes the following occasion to declare this to the people: *They brought to him a man sick of the palsy*

*palsy lying on a bed; and Jesus said unto the sick of the palsy, Son, be of good cheer, thy sins be forgiven thee; immediately some of those present, who were best versed in the law, were startled at this doctrine, which appeared to them as blasphemous; and they reasoned in their own hearts, Why doth this man thus speak blasphemy? Who can forgive sins but God alone? Jesus Christ perceiving in spirit what passed in their hearts, immediately produces new credentials to prove this very point, that he as man had received from God the power of forgiving sins, which he here exercised, and works two stupendous miracles for this purpose, first by shewing them that he knew all that was passing in their hearts; Why do ye reason these things in your hearts? says he; and then by a single word restores the sick man in an instant to perfect health: That ye may know, says he, that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins (he saith to the sick of the palsy), I say to thee arise, and take up thy bed and go thy way unto thy house; and immediately he arose, took up the bed, and went forth before them all: This was enough, all murmurs ceased, the people present were all amazed, and glorified God, saying, we never saw it in this fashion, Mark ii. or, as St Matthew expresses it, They glorified God that had given such power unto men, Matth. ix.*



V. Other examples to the same purpose might be brought, both of our Saviour and the apostles, but the above are sufficient for illustrating our present subject; and I shall only further observe here, that the learned author of the *Dissertation on Miracles* against Hume, seems to have done great injustice to his cause, and exceedingly weakened the authority of the proof from miracles, by the manner in which he pretends to account for the connection between any doctrine and the miracles wrought in attestation of it. He supposes a man of an unblemished character to advance doctrines in religion, unknown before, but not in themselves apparently impious or absurd; and to affirm at the same time, that they were revealed to him by the Spirit of God: It must be owned, says the doctor, there is a very strong presumption against the truth of what he says; this presumption does not arise from any doubt of the man's integrity, for we suppose him of an unblemished character; nor does it arise from any absurdity or immoral tendency we perceive in the doctrine itself; for we suppose it has none such; but it ariseth principally, if not solely, from these two circumstances, the extreme uncommonness of such a revelation, and the great facility with which people of strong fancy may in this particular impose upon themselves. He then supposes further, that this man pretends to have also received from God the power of working miracles; and observes, that we have precisely the same presumption

*sumption against his being endued with such a power, as against his having obtained such a revelation; two things, says he, are asserted, and there is one presumption, and but one, against them, and it equally affects them both; whatever proves either assertion removes the only presumption which hinders our belief of the other. He then lastly supposes, that the man actually works the miracles before us, and consequently removes this only presumption, and thereby manifests a divine communication, upon which he concludes thus, We have now all the evidence which the integrity of the person could give us, as to any ordinary event attested by him, that the doctrine he delivers as from God, is from God, and therefore true. So that, according to this hypothesis, miracles give no other certainty of the divine original and revelation of the doctrines in proof of which they are wrought, than the word of an honest man! It is true, indeed, our author goes on, and affirms that, in the case he has proposed, we have more evidence of the revelation than for any common fact vouched by a person of undoubted probity; because, says he, as God is both almighty and all-wise, if he hath bestowed on any so uncommon a privilege (as that of working miracles), it is highly probable, that it is bestowed for promoting some end uncommonly important; and what more important end than to reveal to men that which may be conducive to their present and eternal happiness? I leave this highly probable argument to have as much force*

force as it can, and only observe, that, after all this flourish, and answering an objection that might be alledged against it, our author himself seems to lay very little stress upon it; for thus, after all, he draws his final conclusion: *And now the connection between the miracle and the doctrine is obvious; the miracle removes the improbability of a supernatural communication, of which communication it is in fact an irrefragable evidence. This improbability, which was the only obstacle, being removed, the doctrine hath, at least, all the evidence of a common fact; attested by a man of known virtue and good sense.* See Dissertation on Miracles, Part ii.

Sect. 3. I shall not say, whether this connection, as it is here explained, will appear so obvious to a Deist, as the learned author would have us believe; but this I think is pretty evident, that the explication he has here given of it will render miracles of no manner of use to the Christian religion; for, in the first place, the Christian religion proposes to our belief doctrines which most certainly did appear absurd to the heathen world at its first appearance; for the word of God assures us, that the doctrine of the Cross is a scandal to the Jews and a folly to the Gentiles: In the second place, these doctrines to this day appear most absurd and contradictory to Deists and unbelievers, a numerous and learned body! who for this very reason most impiously ridicule and reject them: Thirdly, the apostles who first taught these doctrines to the world,



world, and wrought miracles in confirmation of them, were so far from being *men of known virtue and good sense*, that they were absolute strangers in every country into which they went when they first proposed these doctrines; and in their own country itself were men of no character, of no learning, of the lowest class of people, and without any earthly qualification to recommend them: So that the Deist or Atheist may allow all our learned author says, and yet persist in his denying the Christian revelation, because the case he supposes is certainly unconnected both with its doctrines and the persons who first taught them to the world: In fact, the whole argumentation of our author is a mere fictitious hypothesis, dressed in good language, and of course very apt to impose upon the reader's imagination; but in reality more calculated to undermine Christianity than to support it, because absolutely contrary to fact: Can its author produce one single instance wherein his hypothesis ever existed? Can he show any one example wherein those who were present when miracles were wrought, ever dreamed of making that long winding process of arguments which he describes, and at last rested satisfied that the sublime incomprehensible doctrines proposed, must be from God, merely because he was an honest man that said so? No, no; miracles go more quickly to work, and make a more immediate and convincing impression upon the heart of man; those whom

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Almighty God sends to declare his will to man, and by whom he works miracles to confirm what they declare, appeal to the miracles they work as the voice of God himself, attesting the truth of what they teach; as the voice of God they are received by those who see them, and as such give them not a mere probability, as the dissertator pretends, but, as we have seen above, an absolute conviction that these doctrines are from God, which he himself so palpably attests to be so; and consequently the connection betwixt the miracle and the revelation of the doctrine, is not a distant connection, which stands in need of intermediate steps to bring us to the knowledge of it, but it is a most immediate connection, such as are the credentials of an ambassador from his master, both giving him his commission to act as his ambassador, and also authorising him to make those very demands and proposals which he makes to those to whom he is sent.

VI. But to return to my own subject; having shown the authority of miracles in proof of doctrine, from the light of reason, I now proceed to show how great that authority is by proofs drawn from revelation. Proofs of this kind we find in great abundance throughout the whole sacred scripture, both Old and New Testaments, which, for distinction's sake, I shall consider separately, and begin with those from the old law; and *first*, we see there that Almighty God himself appeals to

miracles as the most undoubted and convincing proofs of the divine revelation of what he wants to communicate to his creatures : Thus, when he appeared to Moses in the wilderness, and gave him his commission to go to Egypt and deliver his people from their slavery, Moses was very averse to undertake that charge, and proposes several objections on his part, which Almighty God properly answered ; at last he proposed one on the part of the people, saying, *they will not believe me, nor hearken to my words ; for they will say, the Lord hath not appeared unto thee ;* upon which Almighty God immediately has recourse to miracles, performs two before him, gives him the power of performing the same and others before the people as his credentials, and assures him they will have the desired effect in convincing the people that his commission is divine, which they did accordingly. See Exod. iii. and iv. Now, would ever the Almighty God, a God of infinite wisdom, have given Moses the power of miracles as an undoubted means to convince the people of his being sent by God, if miracles were not a most certain and undoubted proof of the doctrine for which they are performed ? Here let common sense judge and determine.

*Secondly,* At the time when the people of Israel were brought out of Egypt, idolatry had made an amazing progress in all the other nations, especially among



among the Egyptians, and the Israelites were exceedingly prone to follow the example of their neighbours in that respect: On the other hand, Almighty God had nothing more at heart than to preserve them from that abomination, and to convince them that he, and he alone, was the Sovereign Lord and God, and that besides him there was no God: We cannot possibly doubt but that his sovereign wisdom would make use of the properest and best adapted means for effectually convincing them of this truth, which he had so much at heart; and we find, that the means he used for this purpose were the numberless miracles he performed among them: Thus God himself declares to Moses, that he had performed so many signs on Pharaoh, *that ye may know how that I am the Lord*, *Exod. x. 2.* And again, the same Moses recounting all the signs and wonders God had done, says to the people: *Unto thee it was shown that thou mightest know that the Lord he is God; there is none else besides him*, *Deut. iv. 35.* Hence, then, we must conclude, that miracles are a full and certain proof of the revelation of those doctrines for which they are wrought, seeing God himself uses them as the most effectual means for that end.

*Thirdly,* We find that God acknowledges the working of true miracles to be the most undoubted proof, that the One who works them is God: Thus, by the mouth of the prophet Isaiah, he challenges

lenges all false gods to work, if they can, a true miracle in proof of their being gods, and acknowledges so great authority in such a proof, that he promises to receive them as gods if they do it: *Let them shew us what shall happen*, says he, *Isaiah xli. 22, 23. show unto us the things that are to come, that WE MAY KNOW that ye are gods.* Hence, then, true miracles are not only the work of God, but they are also the language of God, by which he speaks to men, and discovers to them his will; and as it is impossible for the devil to speak in this language at all, so it is impossible for Almighty God to use it in attestation of a falsehood; when, therefore, he speaks in this way in attestation of any doctrine proposed, this is a most decisive proof that that doctrine is from him, and consequently most true.

*Fourthly,* Another most convincing proof we have of this truth founded on the divine justice; it is impossible for the divine justice to find fault where there is none, or punish where there is no crime: On the other hand, there can be no crime where there is no transgression of the law, nor can there be any transgression of the law, where the law is not sufficiently known. Consequently, wherever we find the divine justice rigorous in punishing, there, we may be assured, there has been great transgression of the law, and the law fully manifested; now of this we find most severe examples where the manifestation

festation of the law depended solely upon miracles,  
 and where the acting against so strong a proof of  
 the law was alledged by God as a proof of the  
 greatness of the crime : From whence it is mani-  
 fest, that in the judgment of God miracles are a  
 most authentic proof of the revelation of the di-  
 vine will. Let us see, then, these examples ; Mo-  
 ses appears before Pharaoh in the name of God  
 with an order to let the people of Israel go to the  
 wilderness, a thing no less contrary to Pharaoh's  
 interest than to his inclination ; certainly Pharaoh  
 was no ways obliged to take Moses's bare word  
 for what he said ; it was necessary he should  
 give some decisive proof that he really was from  
 God, and authorised by him to make such a de-  
 mand ; Moses flies immediately to miracles as his  
 credentials, and as the most convincing proof that  
 what he had said was true : Pharaoh, however,  
 hardens his heart, and pays no regard to the di-  
 vine command, notwithstanding this proof of its  
 reality ; but immediately the divine vengeance  
 pursues him, and one punishment after another,  
 and that of the severest kind, is inflicted on him and  
 on his people, till at last he and all his host, in pu-  
 nishment of their obstinacy, are drowned in the Red  
 Sea. Now I ask, where was Pharaoh's crime ?  
 where was his transgression, which could deserve  
 so dreadful and severe a punishment ? doubtless his  
 crime consisted in refusing to obey the express com-  
 mand of God delivered to him by Moses, and at-



tested by miracles: But if miracles be not an absolute and decisive attestation of the will of God; if they can possibly be at any time connected with falsehood, or if they be not at all times an undoubted token and proof of the truth, then Pharaoh, notwithstanding the miracles, had no certainty of the divine will, and could not be justly blamed for not complying with it. But the conduct of God shows the weakness of this pretext; he most severely punished Pharaoh for not complying with his orders; and as it is impossible for the divine justice to punish more than a crime deserves, Pharaoh's crime, in not complying, must have been exceeding great, which could deserve from a just God such a punishment: Hence the divine will must have been fully manifested to him; and as the only proof he had of it was by means of the miracles wrought for that purpose, it follows as a most just and necessary consequence, from the dreadful evils which the divine justice sent upon him, that miracles constitute a full, perfect, and decisive proof of the divine will, which none can resist without resisting God himself. Another example, but still more express, to the same purpose, we have in Numb. xiv. when the people murmured against God upon hearing the report of the spies: Almighty God was so displeased with their infidelity, that he complains of it to Moses, and threatens to destroy them for it entirely, taking particular notice of the atrociousness of their crime, as arising from their not believ-  
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ing him, notwithstanding all the miracles he had wrought among them: *And the Lord said unto Moses, How long will this people provoke me? how long will it be ere they believe me, for ALL THE SIGNS WHICH I HAVE SHEWED among them? I will smite them with the pestilence, and disinherit them,* Numb. xiv. 11, 12. It is true, by the interposition of Moses and his prayers, Almighty God was pleased to remit this dreadful threat as to the whole nation, sparing the children and those under twenty years of age; but as for all above that age, except Joshua and Caleb, who had not consented to their crime, he was inexorable, and thus pronounces sentence upon them: *All those men which have seen my glory, and my miracles which I did in Egypt and in the wilderness, and have tempted me now these ten times, and have not hearkened to my voice, surely they shall not see the land which I swear unto their fathers—say you unto them, your carcases shall fall in the wilderness—your children shall wander in the wilderness forty years and bear your whoredoms, until your carcases be wasted in the wilderness, &c.* From the expressions here used, and from the severity of the punishment, we see how exceedingly God was offended at them, and we see that the great cause of the offence of which he complains, was, because they refused to believe and trust in him, notwithstanding the proof he had given them of his Almighty power and goodness by repeated miracles; hence, therefore, these mira-  
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acles were a decisive proof of the truths for which they were wrought, a full and convincing evidence which rendered those who refused to believe it altogether inexcusable before God, and provoked him to so great indignation; and upon the whole, we justly conclude, that true miracles wrought by God are in themselves a decisive proof of doctrine, an authentic testimony of the divine approbation.

VII. In the New Testament also we find the same truth declared to us in the plainest and most convincing manner on several different occasions; our Saviour had declared himself to be the Son of God to the Jews, at which they took exceeding great offence, and sought to kill him, for saying that *God was his Father, making himself equal with God*, John v. 18. Upon this he endeavours by several arguments to explain to them his union and equality with the Father, and, as the proof of all he says, concludes thus: *If I bear witness of myself, my witness is not true; there is another that beareth witness of me, and I know that the witness which he witnesseth of me is true; ye sent unto John, and he bare witness unto the truth, but I receive not testimony from man—but I have a greater witness than that of John; for the works that the Father hath given me to finish, the same works that I do bear witness of me that the Father hath sent me; and the Father himself that hath sent me hath born witness of me.* Here then we see our blessed Saviour declaring a  
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most sublime doctrine to the people, far above all human comprehension, at which they were, upon that very account, greatly scandalized, viz. that he who, to all human appearance, was a mere man, whose parents and kindred they knew, was in reality the eternal Son of God, equal to his Father, who had the same power, even so as to raise the dead, as the Father hath; to whom all judgment was committed by the Father, and who could not be dishonoured by any man without dishonouring the Father at the same time; and to remove the scandal they had taken, and convince them that he was really sent by the Father to reveal this very truth to them, what proof does he bring? why no other but the miracles he performs, *the works that I do bear witness of me that the Father hath sent me.* He seeks no other proof but this; he prefers it before the testimony of St John the Baptist, and looks upon it as fully sufficient to convince them of the reality of his mission, and of the truth of his doctrine, though in itself so sublime, and so apparently presumptuous and false, yea, and looked upon by the Jews as blasphemous.

VIII. Upon another occasion, the Jews earnestly pressed him to tell them in plain terms if he was the Messiah? and he again had recourse to the same proof, declaring it ought thoroughly to convince them that he was so; *the Jews came round about him, and said unto him, How long dost thou make*

make us to doubt? If thou be the Christ, tell us plainly. Jesus answered then, I told you, and ye believed not; the works that I do in my Father's name, they bear witness of me, John x. 24. &c. and a little after concludes, I and my father are one. Upon this the Jews were so highly scandalized, that they took up stones to stone him, as one guilty of blasphemy; because, said they, thou being a man makest thyself God, ver. 33. But he with all calmness appeals again to his miracles as a most undoubted proof of the truth of what he had asserted, If I do not the works of my Father, believe me not; but if I do, though ye believe not me, believe the works, that ye may know and believe that the Father is in me, and I in him, ver. 37. 38. Here again we find the Son of God appealing to his works alone, which he declares to be the works of his Father, as the most authentic and decisive proof of his own godhead, that is, of the most important and fundamental article of the Christian religion; and he rests entirely upon this proof; he seeks no other, looking upon this as the most satisfactory argument he can use to convince unprejudiced minds of the truth of his doctrine. Shall we then dare to arraign the wisdom of the Son of God? shall we dare assert that he made use of an improper or equivocal proof on so solemn and important an occasion? it would surely be the height of blasphemy, and we would be more blameable than the hard-hearted Jews themselves if we did so; we must therefore

therefore conclude, from these appeals of Jesus Christ to miracles in proof of his doctrine, that miracles wrought by God in attestation of the truth, are essentially and undoubtedly connected therewith, and consequently that the authority of miracles, in proof of doctrine, is absolute and conclusive.

IX. The same also beautifully appears from what our Saviour answered to St Philip in presence of the rest of the apostles, when Philip said to him, *Lord, shew us the Father, and it sufficeth us*; Jesus Christ expressed his surprise at this petition, which shewed how little St Philip had understood what his master had often already told them about his divinity and union with the Father; and after explaining it to him again in a most amiable manner, as a proof of the truth of what he had said, he appeals to his works, which ought fully to satisfy him on this head: *Jesus saith unto him, Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? He that hath seen me hath seen the Father? and how sayest thou then, Shew us the Father; believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in me? The words that I speak unto you, I speak not of myself; but the Father that dwelleth in me he doth the works. Believe me that I am in the Father, and the Father in me, or else believe me for the very work's sake, John xiv. 8. et seqq.* In this most beautiful passage, where the Son



Son of God condescends with the most endearing mildness to the weakness of his disciple, we not only see another strong proof of the authority of miracles wrought in attestation of doctrines, even the most sublime and incomprehensible, but we also see explained to us, by Jesus Christ himself, the connection between the miracle wrought and the doctrine attested by it. *The words that I speak unto you, says he, I speak not of myself; I do not give you this doctrine as my own, it was revealed to me by God, and it is from him I declare it to you; but how shall we know that it is so; he immediately adds, the Father that dwelleth in me he doth the works; these works done by him are his own signature, his own declaration that the doctrine I deliver is from him also: He makes use of me as his ambassador to declare to you the doctrine, and he performs the works to attest that the doctrine is his; consequently, as it is absolutely impossible that the God of truth should attest a lie, miracles must be a full and decisive proof that the doctrines attested by them are the truths of God, and revealed by him. All which is still further confirmed by the following testimony of St John: Many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ the Son of God, and that believing ye might have life through his name, John xx. 30, 31.*

X. But

X. But there is no expression of Jesus Christ which shows this truth in stronger colours, than when he condemns the obstinacy of the Jews as absolutely inexcuseable, for not yielding to the blazing light of the truth, which he brought among them by the splendour of his doctrine and miracles. *If I had not come and spoken unto them, says he, they had not had sin, but now they have no cloak for their sin,* John xv. 22. In these words the Jews are condemned without excuse for not receiving the doctrine of our Saviour; but surely they could not in justice have been so condemned for this fault, nor would it have been any fault at all, if Christ had not given them convincing and irrefragable proofs of the divinity both of his mission and doctrine; now, we have seen above that the only proofs he had recourse to for that end, were upon all occasions the miracles he wrought among them; and therefore, a little after, he adds, as the only cause of this their so severe condemnation, that they had refused to yield to this divine light: *If I had not done amongst them the works which none other man did, they had not had sin; but now have they both seen and hated both me and my father,* ver. 24. See here what it was that rendered them without all excuse in the sight of God. God the Father had manifested himself to them in the most sensible manner by the works which Jesus Christ wrought in his name; yet they obstinately shut their eyes against this divine light, hated Jesus Christ who

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brought it among them, and consequently hated his Father also ; therefore, they in their turn were rejected by him, and justly condemned as guilty of the most inexcuseable obstinacy : But this condemnation would certainly have been most unjust, if miracles were not the most incontestible proofs of doctrine ; shall we then say that their condemnation was unjust ? God forbid. We must therefore conclude, as above, that miracles are essentially connected with the revelation of the doctrines attested by them, and that their authority in proof of these doctrines is absolute and decisive.

XI. I shall not here repeat the appeal made by our Saviour to his miracles as a proof of his being the Messiah, when St John's disciples put the question to him if he was so ; nor his curing the man sick of the palsy, on purpose to convince the Jews that he, as man, had received power from God to forgive sins ; both these we have seen above, and it is needless to repeat them here, as it is easy to see, from what I have already said, how beautifully both these examples prove the essential connection between miracles and the doctrine attested by them ; but I must not omit what our Saviour expressly declares on another occasion, when his enemies pretended that his casting out devils was by the power of Satan ; upon his performing a miracle of this kind, and restoring the poor person that had been possessed to the use of his speech and



and fight, of both which he had been deprived by the devil, the people were filled with admiration: But his enemies fearing the consequences of so glaring a demonstration of his power and divinity, seemed to make light of it, and pretended to account for it, by saying, *he casteth out devils by Beelzebub the chief of the devils*; our Saviour immediately demonstrates the weakness and falsity of this allegation, by observing it was impossible Satan should fight against himself, or that such a miracle could be performed but by the power of God; and then concludes thus: *If I, by the finger of God, cast out devils, NO DOUBT the kingdom of God is come upon you*, Matt. xii. and Luke xi. See here the very point we have all along had in view declared in exprefs terms by Jesus Christ himself; he came among the Jews to establish the kingdom of God among them; the proof he brings of his mission, and the arguments he uses to establish that kingdom, are his miracles, and such miracles as could be performed by none but God, among which this of his casting out the devil bore a distinguished place; and he declares, that these miracles are so decisive proofs of the truth of his doctrine, that it could admit of no manner of doubt, *If I, by the finger of God, cast out devils, NO DOUBT the kingdom of God is come upon you*.

XII. The same method that Jesus Christ took himself to convince the Jews of the truth of his

doctrine, he was pleased should be followed by his apostles also, whom he sent to preach that doctrine to the whole world; he gave them the power of working miracles, or, to speak more properly, he wrought many miracles by their means, in order thereby to convince the world of the divinity of their mission, and to establish and confirm the doctrine taught by them. After his ascension, when they had received the Holy Ghost, they immediately began to execute the great work their Master had given them to do, which St Mark expresses in these words, *and they went forth and preached every where; the Lord working with them, and CONFIRMING the word with signs following*, Mark xvi. 20. In the Acts also we are told, that *the apostles with GREAT POWER gave witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus*, Acts iv. 33. St Paul, in like manner, when called to the same glorious employment, used the same means in promoting his master's cause; for thus he tells us in his epistle to the Romans, that it was by miracles that he planted the gospel wherever he went; *by mighty signs and wonders*, says he, *by the power of the spirit of God; so that from Jerusalem, and round about to Illyrium, I have fully preached the gospel of Christ*, Rom. xv. 19. And again, writing to the Corinthians, *When I came to you, I came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring to you the testimony of God; for I determined not to know any thing among you save Jesus Christ, and him*

*him crucified—and my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in DEMONSTRATION OF THE SPIRIT, AND OF POWER, that your faith should not stand in the wisdom of man, but IN THE POWER OF GOD, I Cor. ii.*

Here this great apostle informs us what the means were which he used in planting the gospel; the only doctrine he preached, the only wisdom he pretended to teach them, was the great mystery of a crucified God; this, in the preceding chapter, he assures us was *a stumbling block to the Jews, and to the Greeks foolishness*; to persuade the Corinthians to receive and embrace this unheard-of doctrine as the truths of God, he laid aside all human means, he used no pomp of eloquence, *no enticing words of man's wisdom*; he called upon the spirit of God to attest and demonstrate the truth of the word he preached to them, by exerting his almighty power in working miracles, as the means the most adapted for the purpose designed; and by these he obtained his end, and converted them to Christianity. Now, in all these cases, seeing the divine wisdom thought proper to use miracles as the most proper means to convince the world that the truths of the gospel, so sublime and incomprehensible in themselves, and so foolish in the eyes of worldly wisdom, were nevertheless the truths of God, and revealed by him; shall we dare to say this means was improper, inadequate, or incapable of procuring what was intended by them? Certainly



no one, who believes the scripture to be the word of God can do so ; we must then conclude, again, that miracles are decisive proofs of doctrine, and that their authority as such is incontrovertible : St Paul was so sensible of this, that he declares there is no salvation for such as refuse to embrace the doctrine of Christ, which is demonstrated to be the truth of God by such convincing evidence ; for after beginning his epistle to the Hebrews, by informing us that God, who in former times had spoken to men, and declared his will to them by the ministry of angels, had *in these later days spoken to us by his son—by whom he also made the worlds* ; he then goes on to show the vast excellency of the Son above the angels, from which he draws this obvious consequence, that we ought to pay of course so much the greater regard to what he has taught us, and be the more careful not to lose it ; *therefore, says he, we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip*, Heb. i. 1. And then immediately alluding to the punishments inflicted on those who transgressed, or disobeyed what had been delivered by angels, he draws as a natural consequence of this argument, that it is impossible we should escape if we refuse what has been delivered by the Lord of angels, especially when so strongly manifested by the many miracles wrought by God to attest and confirm it ; *for if the word spoken by angels, says he, was stedfast, and every transgression*

*transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward, how shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him, God also bearing them witness both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to his own will? ver. 2, 3, 4.* From which words it is plain, that St Paul, or rather the Holy Ghost who inspired him, looked upon miracles wrought by God in confirmation of doctrine, to be a full, perfect and decisive proof that the doctrine so confirmed is divine truth, and all those who refuse to believe it on such proof are inexcusable before God, and shall be punished accordingly.

XIII Though the several passages of holy scripture, which I have here made use of, have necessarily carried me on to a considerable length, and have occasioned my making repetitions in the application of them, which to some may seem superfluous; yet, as the subject is of so great importance, and each of these passages has something of a peculiar force and energy in proving the point in question, I thought it a pity either to omit any of them intirely, or even to blend them together in one argument; which, though it would have made more dispatch, yet it would at the same time have lost a great deal of that weight and strength of proof which a separate and distinct view of each will naturally have,

have, in the mind of every one who seriously and attentively considers them ; besides, as the importance of the subject I treat of is so great, it were desirable that what is said upon it should be made so plain and easy, that it may be thoroughly comprehended by the meanest capacity, which indeed is a point I have all along had in view, and must plead my apology for any unnecessary length I may be thought guilty of, by those whose superior parts may think it tedious and disagreeable to see so minute a detail of the points I handle, which they would easily and fully comprehend from a few hints.

XIV. It is for the same reason that, though the arguments I have already brought, both from reason and revelation, be more than enough to prove the authority of miracles wrought by God in proof of doctrine, yet I must not be content with these, but adduce one or two more, in order to fortify this important subject on all sides, and show how every way blameable these are who call it in question. And the first argument I shall propose is an appeal to experience, and to the common sentiments of all mankind : Let us only examine the fact what effects miracles have always had on the heart of man, and this will palpably demonstrate to us the authority and weight of a proof from them. When Elijah had raised to life the widow's son, and restored him to his mother, she immediately



immediately cried out in raptures of joy and admiration, *Now BY THIS I know that thou art a man of God, and that the word of the Lord in thy mouth is truth*, 1 Kings xvii. 24. The moment Naaman was so miraculously cured of the leprosy, he was converted upon the spot from his idolatry, and said to Elisha, *Behold now I know that there is no God in all the earth but in Israel*, 2 Kings v. 15. In the grand dispute betwixt Elijah and the prophets of Baal, whether the Lord or Baal was the true God, with one consent it was put to the test of a miracle; and when this was performed in favour of Almighty God, all the people to a man yielded to the heavenly light, and with one voice cried out, *The Lord he is God, the Lord he is God*, 1 Kings xviii. Nebuchadnezzar, a heathen prince, whose haughty heart could not brook to acknowledge, even in God, a power superior to his own; and *who is the God*, said he to the holy children, *that will deliver you out of my hand?* Dan. iii. 15. yet was so confounded when he saw their miraculous deliverance from the fiery furnace, that he instantly acknowledged their God to be the only true God, and made a decree whereby he commanded him to be respected through all his empire, and threatened the utmost destruction to any one who should dare to *speake any thing amiss against him*. The same effect the delivery of Daniel in the den of lions had upon king Darius, who made a decree like the former, wherein, convinced by the glaring light.

light of Daniel's miraculous preservation, he acknowledges that *his God is the living God, and steadfast for ever, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed, and his dominion shall be even unto the end; that he delivereth, and rescueth, and worketh signs and wonders in the heavens, and in the earth, who hath delivereth Daniel from the power of the lions, Dan. vi.*

XV. Nothing could be more foreign to the common sentiments of mankind, than to imagine that man should have the power of forgiving sins upon earth which were committed against the great God of heaven: We see in what an odious light almost all the reformed churches look upon a pretence of this kind, and the Jews esteemed it a downright blasphemy; yet, no sooner did our blessed Saviour work the miracle of curing the sick man of the palsy, to prove that he, as man, and whom the Jews then looked upon to be only a mere man, had this power, than immediately his most inveterate enemies were struck dumb; they had not a word more to say against it; and both they, and the whole multitude present, were filled with amazement at so luminous a proof, acknowledged that to be a divine truth which before they had esteemed a downright blasphemy, and *glorified God who had given such power unto men, Matth. ix. 8.* What was it that convinced Nicodemus of the divine mission of our Saviour, but the splendour of

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his miracles ! *Rabbi*, said he to him, *we know that thou art a teacher come from God, for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him,* John iii. 2. When the man, whom our Saviour restored to his sight, though born blind, heard the Pharisees speaking disrespectfully of his benefactor, he immediately undertook his vindication by this natural argument, a consequence of the miraculous cure he had performed ; *Now we know that God heareth not sinners ; but if any man be a worshipper of God, and doth his will, him he heareth ; since the world began was it not heard that any man opened the eyes of one that was born blind ; if this man were not of God, he could do nothing,* John ix. 31. &c. Observe here with what strength of argument he proves the divine mission of Jesus Christ ; first he lays down this principle, that God doth not perform wondrous things at the desire of sinners, but is ready to hear those who are his friends and servants ; then he considers the nature of the miracle performed, which shews itself evidently to be the work of God, the like of which had not been heard of from the beginning of the world, and from these two premises he draws this necessary consequence ; since, therefore, in fact, God has wrought this real miracle at the desire, and by means of Jesus Christ, he must undoubtedly be from God, and God must be with him ; this is the natural language which true miracles speak ; this is the impression they never fail to make on the heart of man.

XVI. It



XVI. It were endless to collect together the many instances which are found in every page of the gospel, of this natural but deep impression which the miracles of Jesus Christ made upon the Jews; the blazing light of this proof convinced them at once, and they sought no further evidence of the truth of what he said to them: But perhaps it will be objected here, that in reality this impression was not general, that many, and those the most learned, and of the greatest authority, paid no regard at all to the miracles of our Saviour, and were so far from being persuaded that his doctrine was true upon that account, that they looked upon him only as an impostor, and condemned him at last as an impious malefactor.

XVII. This objection is so far from weakening the force of our present argument, that it greatly confirms it; for it is evident, from the whole history of our Saviour in his public life, that the continual opposition he met with from the chief priests, scribes and Pharisees, was intirely owing to the most inveterate hatred and envy they had conceived against him, which could not endure to see the esteem and credit which the miracles he wrought procured to him among the people; and therefore, blinded by these passions, they did violence to themselves in resisting that natural impression which his miracles did in fact make upon them. Let us only see what conviction they gave them, and what

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a contrast was in their hearts by opposing that evidence; read the account given of their behaviour when the man was restored to his sight that had been born blind: the evidence of this miracle confounded them; they called the man, and interrogated him what had been done to him; they would not believe he had been born blind; they questioned his parents; they asked himself what he thought of the matter; they used all the art they could to find a handle to discredit the miracle; but why all this? doubtless from no other reason but because of the conviction the miracle carried along with it, that the person who wrought it was from God, which their exulcerated hearts were determined never to acknowledge; but in spite of this it gained even upon some of them, who said, *How can a man that is a sinner do such miracles? and there was a division among them*, John ix. 16. And again, when some said, *he hath a devil and is mad*; others immediately replied, *Can a devil open the eyes of the blind?* John x. 10, 21. From all this, then, it appears that even his enemies themselves were convinced by his miracles, though their diabolical passions so blinded them, that they never would allow themselves to attend to, much less to acknowledge the conviction. This appears still further from their behaviour when Lazarus was raised from the dead; this stupenduous miracle so alarmed them, that they immediately called a council to deliberate what was to be done; and when they were met

for this purpose, they plainly acknowledged both the reality of our Saviour's miracles, and the natural effect which they must undoubtedly have among the people : *This man doth many miracles, say they ; if we let him thus alone, all men will believe on him.* Could there be a greater proof of the impression these miracles made upon themselves ? they here plainly acknowledge their force in persuading, and if they are not persuaded themselves, it is because the strength of their passions, contrasting the evidence of the proof, will not allow them to be so. Another proof we have of this unhappy disposition of theirs, when St Peter and St John cured the cripple man at the door of the temple ; this miracle had so surprising an effect, that no less than about five thousand men were converted after it. The chief priests and rulers were not a little grieved at this, and laid hands on them, bringing them before their council, and the man that had been cured along with them : Here St Peter boldly declared, that this miraculous cure was performed in the name of Jesus Christ, and in attestation of his being risen from the dead, and that there is no salvation but through him ; and that this proof was so convincing, that the scripture expressly observeth, *they had nothing to say against it ;* this miracle, then, made the proper impression upon the hearts even of the most inveterate enemies of Jesus ; they were convinced by it ; they could not reply any thing to its evidence, but thro' the



the malice of their hearts, they would not be converted; and putting the apostles aside, they said, *What shall we do to these men? for that indeed a notable miracle has been done by them, is manifest to all them that dwell at Jerusalem, and we cannot deny it:* See here the impression the miracle made upon them; but instead of yielding to its light, they added, *but that it spread no further among the people, let us straitly threaten them that they speak henceforth to no man in this name,* Acts iv. Seeing therefore, upon the whole, that even those whose hearts were so blinded with passion, that they were determined not to yield to conviction, could not help, however, giving such plain indications of the deep impression the miracles of Christ and his apostles made upon their minds, and how sensible they were of the effects they must produce in others; this testimony from adversaries is the most convincing proof of any of the common sentiments of all mankind in this matter.

XVIII. As we proceed in our induction our proofs multiply upon our hands; after our Saviour was gone to heaven, his apostles entered upon the grand undertaking of reforming the whole world, overturning all established religions, rooting out the most inveterate opinions, destroying the deepest prejudices, enlightening the most stupid nations with the knowledge of the sublime truths of salvation; and in a word, of subjecting the whole world

to the faith and law of Jesus Christ : The project was vast and replete with dangers, and the difficulty that appeared in it seemed insurmountable ; they themselves, poor simple men, without the smallest human means to recommend them, or any help of man to assist them ; yet they boldly enter upon the glorious enterprise, and, carried on by the ardour of their zeal, never cease till they have accomplished it ; the means they made use of for this purpose were not the *enticing words of human wisdom*, but the stupenduous miracles they every where performed ; these served them instead of every thing else, and produced the most amazing effects in the hearts of the spectators ; for being regarded as the voice of heaven, which they really were, they at once overcame the most inveterate prejudices, and *captivated their understandings in obedience to Christ* ; convinced them that the doctrines attested by these miracles were the truths of God, and without any other arguments converted them to Christianity. Thus, when St Peter came to Lydda ; *there he found a certain man named Æneas, which had kept his bed eight years, and was sick of a palsy ; and Peter said to him, Æneas, Jesus Christ maketh thee whole, arise and make thy bed ; and he arose immediately.* This was enough ; there was no need of other arguments to convince the people of that place of the truths of the gospel ; this miracle alone was the most decisive proof of their being from God ; for, immediately *all that*  
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*dwelt at Lydda turned unto the Lord, Acts ix. 33. et seqq.* In like manner, when St Philip went down to Samaria to preach the gospel to that city, it is surprising to see what numbers were converted by him; but by what means was this brought about? By the powerful eloquence of his miracles; for, *the people with one accord gave heed unto these things which Philip spake, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did; for unclean spirits, crying with a loud voice, came out of many that were possessed with them; and many taken with palsies, and that were lame, were healed, and there was great joy in that city, Acts viii.* Nay, even Simon the magician himself, who before had pretended to be some great one, and had bewitched the Samaritans with his sorceries, was so confounded at the miracles wrought by Philip, that, unable to resist such evidence, he yielded the day, and became a Christian. When Elymas the sorcerer endeavoured to turn away the proconsul Sergius from hearing the word of God, St Paul, with one sentence, in the name of the Lord, struck him blind, in punishment of his impiety; the deputy Sergius sought no more; this miraculous punishment of that wretch convinced him at once, that the doctrine in defence of which it was performed must be from God, and therefore, *when he saw what was done he believed, being astonished at the doctrine of the Lord, Acts xiii. 12.* What these three great saints did was done by all the rest of the apostles and other apostolical



men, whom Almighty God made use of to convert the heathen world to Christianity; they used no human helps for this purpose; their arms like their doctrine were altogether divine, the voice of the Almighty attesting what they taught by the amazing miracles he performed for this purpose. These every where had their desired effect, converted vast numbers to the faith of Christ, and confounded those who, through the violence of their passions, and their inveterate prejudices, would not be converted.

XIX. Now, what is the natural consequence to be drawn from this long induction of examples? Nothing surely can more clearly demonstrate the voice of unprejudiced nature, and the common sentiments of all mankind with regard to the supreme authority of miracles wrought by Almighty God in proof of doctrine: We see here, from the evidence of facts, the deep impression divine miracles have always made on the heart of man, and that by themselves alone, immediately and without any help of reasoning upon them; yea, indeed, altogether independently on any circumstances whatsoever: And here I may appeal to the very hearts of those who pretend to deny this authority; suppose you had been present in our Saviour's days, and been an eye-witness of all he did; suppose you yourselves had been possessed by the devil, or lame, or blind, or paralytic, or otherwise diseased, and had been  
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miraculously and instantaneously cured by him ; lay your hand upon your breast, and ask your own heart what effect, what deep impression this must have made upon you ? I seek no other proof, I require no other voucher for the truth of what I here defend, than the unprejudiced answer which your own heart will here give you.

XX. This observation leads me to another argument in proof of the authority of miracles, with which I shall conclude this subject ; and that is, the very testimony of our adversaries themselves : Convinced as they are in their own hearts of this truth, it is impossible for them, on certain occasions, not to discover it : Some of them, indeed, have acknowledged it in express terms ; but all of them agree in confessing it indirectly, when they take so much pains to argue against it and ridicule it. What could have induced a David Hume to puzzle his brain, and spend so much time and study as he must have done in inventing, dressing up, and publishing his bauble of an argument, by which he would pretend to demonstrate, that it is absolutely impossible ever to prove the existence of a miracle ? What could move him to this, I say, but the interior conviction residing in the bottom of his heart, that if one single true miracle should be allowed in proof of Christianity, it alone would overbalance all his flimsy sophistry in favour of infidelity ? What could have induced a Rousseau to use such insidious arts,

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as he does throughout the whole of his *Emilius*, when he speaks of miracles, confounding the true state of the question, making false suppositions, and general appeals to the scripture for what is not to be found in so much as one single text, and sometimes even plainly contradicting himself and his own principles; in order by these ungenerous means to enervate the force and authority of miracles? What, I say, could make him be guilty of such a conduct which so much exposes himself, but the interior conviction he had, on the one hand, of the greatness of that authority which he wanted to destroy; and his determinate resolution on the other, like that of the chief priests and rulers of the Jews, never to acknowledge it? What, in a word, can induce a Voltaire, and the whole infidel tribe of his brother Deists, to be at so much pains to turn all miracles, even those of the sacred scripture into ridicule, and to throw out their impious sneers on all occasions against them, but their being conscious of the effect they must undoubtedly have, if received and believed; and that it is not in their own power to find any other solid reason against them? Dr Conyers Middleton, the most outrageous enemy that ever Christian miracles had, condemns all of forgery and imposture, that ever were related since the apostolic age; and that for this only but plain reason, because if we allow their existence in one age after the apostles, we cannot in reason deny them in all succeeding ages, seeing the



the proofs for their existence are absolutely the same in every age since that time ; and then, if this be granted, there is no contesting the truth of Popery ; for (what follows are his own words), *a clear succession of miracles, deduced through all history, from the apostolic times down to our own—is a proof of all others the most striking to all minds, and the most decisive indeed to all minds, as far as it is believed to be true*, Introd. Disc. p. 41. Could any thing but the main force of truth extort such an acknowledgment of the supreme authority of miracles from so declared an enemy? Those learned gentlemen who differ in opinion from Dr Middleton about the proper period of the cessation of miracles, are, however, of the same opinion with him as to their authority in proof of doctrine : *It must be granted*, says doctor Church, in his Vindication, page 62. and 63. *that present facts, which are appeals to the senses, are more striking and satisfactory, than any long intricate reasonings : And hence miracles may be pronounced to be the shortest and clearest means of conviction of the divine authority of any mission, and consequently of any doctrine, to those who see them. And farther, as we may have sufficient certainty of their having been worked in times past, they must, if well attested, be full proofs even to us who do not see them.* This is a just observation, founded on the nature of the thing itself ; and it is owing to the full conviction of this truth, that all Dr Middleton's adversaries

versaries, though they disagree with him as to the precise period when miracles ceased in the Christian church; yet all agree, and labour with all their might, to prove that they have actually long since ceased; namely, at such periods as they think proper respectively to assign; because, as at these assumed periods, they suppose the corruptions of Popery began; to allow true miracles to be wrought after that, would, according to the above principle, be fairly yielding the day in favour of Popery; for it is worth observing, that what Atheists and Deists are forced to do against the Christian miracles in general, the children of the reformation are obliged, upon the self-same principle, to do against the miracles wrought in the Catholic church; each of them feeling in their own hearts the conviction and authority of such a proof, are determined never to acknowledge it where their prejudices or passions induce them to reject the doctrine; because such an acknowledgment would be an utter condemnation of themselves; and both sides in this respect copy after the example of the chief priests and rulers of the Jews in their behaviour with regard to the miracles of Christ and his apostles.

Having thus established the authority of miracles upon the most solid foundation, I should now go on to consider and refute the objections brought against

gainst it; but as their weakness will better appear when we have considered the criterion of miracles, which I shall next treat of, and which, as we shall see, is intimately connected with their authority, I shall delay taking notice of the objections till we have considered that important subject; that by this means their insufficiency and weakness may the more manifestly be exposed.



## CHAP. X.

*On the CRITERION of MIRACLES.*

I. **F**ROM what we have seen above on the authority of miracles, and especially from the explication there given of the true state of that important question, it appears, that two things are pre-required for establishing this authority, so that it may have its full force, and make a due impression on the heart of man: First, that the miraculous facts do actually exist: Secondly, that they be performed by God, either immediately by his own almighty power, or by angels commissioned by him. If no miracle exist, or be pretended to exist, we are then out of the question; but when we are certain of the reality of the fact, we easily see, by looking into our own hearts, that its whole weight and authority is intirely founded on the supposition, that it has Almighty God for its author; for, if we either know, or even suspect, that what is done is not the work of God, its authority that instant falls to the ground. Hence there arises two other questions of no small consequence in this matter; in each of which the enemies of religion have used their utmost efforts to puzzle and darken the truth, by every vile art in their power, that they might

might thereby the more effectually deprive the Christian faith of the invincible armour and strong defence which she draws from the splendour of her miracles. The first of these questions is, *How shall we know that the miraculous facts did ever actually exist?* Deism and infidelity reply here, it is impossible ever to know this: *Where, cries Rousseau, are these miracles to be seen? are they related only in Books? pray who wrote these books?—men—who were witnesses to these miracles;—men—who attest them? what! always human testimonies! Is it always men who tell me what other men have told them? what a number of these are constantly between me and the Deity!* Emil. vol. III. p. 108. At other times he pretends to disprove their existence, as if it were unworthy of the Deity to have recourse to such means of convincing his creatures; and would persuade us, that the very number of miracles said to have happened is a proof that none ever existed at all: So that, according to him and his brethren (for he only speaks the language common to all the party), it is impossible for us to know for certain that any miracle ever existed of which we were not ourselves the eye-witnesses. It is also well known how strenuously the celebrated David Hume, another noted champion of infidelity, has attacked the existence of miracles, and employed the utmost stretch of genius, and all the arts of sophistry, to persuade the world, that *a miracle supported by any human testimony, is more properly a subject of derision than of argument; and that*

*no testimony for any kind of miracle can ever possibly amount to a probability, much less to a proof,* Ess. on Mir. p. 194. and 202. How far common sense approves of such ridiculous assertions, is now apparent from the contempt with which his famous argument, *in which he trusted*, is every where regarded! but these endeavours, however, show the spirit of the party, the conviction they feel of the invincible force of miracles so fatal to their cause, and their consequent horror at the very thought of their existence. The second question is a sequel of the former; for in the supposition that a miraculous operation is actually performed, it is next to be enquired, *How shall we know that it is truly the work of God, and not a delusion of Satan?* If infidelity labours hard to disprove the existence of miracles, it endeavours with no less ardour to persuade us, that, though they should be allowed an existence, we are not a bit nearer our point, because it is impossible to distinguish whether they be from God or from the devil; and consequently that we can never have any certainty of what is pretended to be proved by them. But without repeating here the absurdities with which those gentlemen have favoured, or rather pestered the world on this subject, and the many little arts they use to obscure the truth, and confound the true state of the question, I shall proceed, as usual, to clear it of the rubbish they have thrown upon it, to lay down these principles which reason and religion point out



out to us, as a proper foundation whereon to build its defence, and shall endeavour to raise upon them such a superstructure as will convince any reasonable man, that both the existence of miracles can be proved beyond contradiction, and that it can be known with equal evidence what miracles are, and what are not from God.

II. By the criterion of miracles, taken in the most general sense that the word can bear, may be understood those rules by which we form a right judgment of both these questions, *that is*, both of the existence of any miracle, and of its being, or not being, the work of the deity : But this general sense is not the one in which it is commonly taken. The existence of any miracle is a question of fact, to be determined, like all other questions of that nature, by that kind of evidence which is common to all facts, and which we shall consider at large in its proper place ; but whether a miraculous event, known to exist, is, or is not the work of God, is a question of a peculiar kind, which must be determined by certain rules of judging proper to this subject only : And by the term CRITERION OF MIRACLES, is more commonly understood the rules laid down for this purpose. It is only in this sense that I at present use it ; and to find out this criterion, *that is*, to investigate and lay down those rules, by which we may be enabled to judge with certainty if the miraculous event be the work of

God, or the operation of Satan, is the subject of our present enquiry : But to do this with the necessary precision and clearness, a few things must be premised.

III. *imo*, We must carefully distinguish between these two things, *to tempt*, and *to induce into error*. To *tempt* is to present, or not to remove such occasions as solicit and entice us to do any thing contrary to our duty, but do not to force us. This may be done two ways, when either the thing to which we are tempted is what we know to be contrary to our duty, as when a person is solicited by evil companions to rob and steal ; or when the evil action is proposed to us under the appearance of being good and lawful, or even a duty itself, but the fallacy of which appearance we can easily discover if we use due care : Thus Eve was tempted to eat the forbidden fruit, under the appearance of bettering her condition, in order to *become as gods* ; though, had she had the smallest reflection, she could easily have seen that even this, though true, could never excuse her transgressing the express command of the God that made here : Thus also, Saul was tempted to transgress the orders delivered to him by the prophet Samuel, from an appearance of necessity, when he offered up sacrifice before that prophet's arrival, 1 Sam. xv. though by a little attention he might easily have discovered the delusion ; in temptations  
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of this kind, *Satan*, as the scripture expresses it, *transforms himself into an angel of light*, the better to compass his ends against us. Now, in all these cases we are solicited, we are enticed to do the evil proposed, but we are not forced; we have it in our power to withhold our consent, to discover the delusion, and reject the proposal. But *to induce into error* is of a very different nature; this is to lay before us an inevitable necessity of our falling, to prepare for us a certain and infallible determination to evil, to put a snare in our way, which it is not possible for us to escape falling into. This also may be conceived to be done two ways; *first*, when a person sees the evil, and knows it to be evil, if we should suppose him to be deprived of interior liberty, and irresistibly determined by some invisible agent to chuse that evil; in this case his fall is unavoidable; he wills the evil which he knows to be evil, and it is impossible for him not to will it, being, as we suppose, antecedently and irresistibly determined by something distinct from himself to will it. *Secondly*, If we suppose the evil action be proposed to one under the appearance of duty, and that of strict obligation, but in such circumstances that it is absolutely impossible for him to discover the fallacy and delusion; here also that person would be necessarily induced to error, which he cannot avoid, because, as we suppose, it is presented to him under such delusive veils, as it is not in his power to penetrate. Now,



it is evident to common sense, that tho' Almighty God may, for his own most just and wise ends, *tempt us himself*, or permit us to be *tempted by others*, yet it is absolutely impossible he should either *himself induce us to error*, or *permit others to do so*; because, it is plain, that by so doing he would manifestly contradict himself, and act contrary to his own divine attributes, his justice, his veracity, and his goodness; *that is*, he would himself become the author of sin, error and falsehood. God permitted Job to be tempted to impatience by his wife, by his three friends, and by the devil. But Job knowing that impatience was a sin, and that his duty required of him to receive with submission whatever the divine providence should send or permit to come upon him, resisted the temptation and preserved his integrity. When Satan tempted our Saviour himself, he proposed two of his temptations under the appearance of good, namely, to prove himself to be the Son of God by an act of omnipotence, commanding the stones to be made bread; and to shew his confidence in the divine protection, by throwing himself down from the pinnacle of the temple, in hopes of being preserved from all hurt by the Angels, according to the text of scripture cited for that end; but our Saviour well knew the delusion in both cases, and rejected the temptation; but as to *inducing us to evil*, the word of God expressly declares to us, that *God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted a-*

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bove what you are able, but with the temptation will also make a way to escape, that you may be able to bear it, 1 Cor. x. 13. In which words it is plainly declared that Almighty God never will permit us to be induced into evil, to be tempted in such a way that it will be out of our power to escape; nay, that it would be inconsistent with his fidelity to do so. This will appear in a still stronger light if we consider what is meant when we say that God himself tempts us, or permits us to be tempted; for we must carefully observe, that Almighty God, neither in the temptations he sends on man himself, nor in those which he permits from others, ever intends that the person so tempted should consent to the temptation, and commit sin; far from it; he expressly commands the contrary; the sole and only views Almighty God has in tempting man, either by himself or others, are to prove him, to try him, to see if, in fact, he be faithful to him, to give him an occasion of acquiring great good to his soul by overcoming the temptation, and thereby of improving himself in solid virtue; and sometimes also he does it in just punishment for sins committed, and abuse of mercy; and in this manner, it is said, that *God tempted Abraham*, Genesis xxii. 1. And in several other places of scripture he is expressly said to prove or tempt his people, See Exod. xv. 25. and xvi. 4. In this manner, also, an angel of Satan was permitted to tempt St Paul for his greater humiliation

humiliation and exercise of virtue ; but God himself assured him, that *his grace was sufficient for him*. It is true, when the wicked spirits are permitted to tempt man, their ardent desire is indeed to lead us to sin ; but in this sense God never tempts ; and for this reason the scripture says of God, *Let no man when he is tempted say, I am tempted of God, for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man*, James i. 13. Seeing, then, that God cannot so much as tempt one, or permit him to be tempted, with the direct view and intention that he should thereby fall into sin, much less can he, a God of infinite goodness, holiness and truth, induce man to error or sin by putting him under an unavoidable necessity of falling into either.

2do, We have seen from the most evident and repeated testimony of scripture, that Almighty God has at all times made use of miracles to attest the revelation of his will to man, or confirm the truth of his revelation formerly made when called in question ; and that he bestows the gift of miracles as his divine credentials on those whom he sends to the world as his messengers for that purpose. Nay, we have seen that he looks upon this kind of proof to be so full and sufficient, that he condemns those as altogether inexcusable who refuse to submit themselves to its evidence, and punishes their obstinacy in the severest manner. From this, then, it flows as a necessary consequence, that it is impossible Almighty God should ever abuse this kind of proof,



proof, and prostitute it so as to make it *infallibly promote and patronize error*; or that he should even permit others so to do; for this would not only be altogether unworthy of himself, but would also invalidate every revelation of his will, which he has hitherto made to his creatures, and give them a just handle to call it in question, and even to deny it.

3<sup>tho</sup>, We have also seen, from a most universal induction of examples, both of friends and enemies, that a proof from miracles is of all others the most convincing and decisive; that it makes the deepest impression on the human heart; that it acts immediately, and of itself, prior to all reasoning or reflection; our nature being so framed and constituted by our Creator, that we no sooner apprehend any miraculous operation as the work of God, than we instantaneously feel the full weight of its authority in proof of the doctrine attested by it: Now this immediate perception of the necessary connection between miracles wrought by God in proof of doctrine, and the truth of the doctrine itself, or this universal persuasion which all men have that the doctrine must be from God; when he himself works miracles in attestation of its being so; this, I say, being a part of our frame interwoven in our very constitution by the Deity, and the connection itself, when adverted to, appearing evident to natural reason, and founded on the divine perfections, it is plainly repugnant to the idea we have of God, and

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of his perfections, to suppose that he should ever abuse this disposition of our nature by making use of it himself, or permitting others to do so, as an *inevitable and infallible* mean of leading us to error or sin.

IV. From these three observations, the justness of which, I imagine, will not be called in question, the following conclusions necessarily result, and may be looked upon as axioms or fundamental principles in the present question.

(1.) *God Almighty can never possibly work a miracle, in any case or in any circumstances whatever, in order thereby to attest or give a sanction to falsehood.* This proposition is evident in its very terms, and needs no illustration: God is a Being of infinite veracity, who cannot possibly will or intend falsehood or error, much less set his hand and seal to promote it (if I may say so), by working a miracle for that intent. Neither can he possibly lay his creatures under an unavoidable necessity of falling into error, nor make use of that supreme influence which he himself has given to miracles over the hearts of men, as an infallible means to deceive; all which he would effectually be guilty of, did he ever work a miracle in attestation of a lie.

(2.) *God can never permit any created agent to work a miracle, in order to attest or give a sanc-*

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tion to falsehood, when it is impossible for mankind to discover that the miracle wrought is only a relative miracle, and within the natural abilities of a creature. There are many kinds of miraculous operations which, we know can be performed by supernatural created agents, as we have seen above; there are others which we shall see by and by, can only be performed by the almighty power of God; but as we are ignorant how far the power of created agents can go, there doubtless are many miraculous operations within the reach of their power, which yet we could not discover to be so, nor distinguish from what is proper to God alone. It is only concerning these that this present axiom proceeds; for, if we suppose the miracle performed, though in itself it be only a relative miracle within the natural abilities of the angels, whether good or bad, yet to be of such uncommon greatness that we could not possibly discover it to be within the power of any creature, so that it had all the appearance of a divine miracle; on this supposition it is impossible that Almighty God should permit any created agent to perform such a miracle in attestation or defence of a falsehood. The reason is plain, because such a miracle with regard to its effects on man would be intirely the same as a miracle wrought by God himself; and consequently, if he should permit such a miracle to be performed in attestation of error, he would, by that, necessarily induce his creatures into



into error, abuse the only external means of convincing them of his will, and prostitute that very constitution of their nature, which he himself has formed, by making it the infallible means of deceiving them. Hence Dr Clarke very justly observes, that *God cannot work miracles to deceive men himself, nor permit evil spirits to impose upon men when the error would be invincible, which would be the very same thing as if he worked them himself*, Evid. of Nat. and Rev. Rel. p. 228. Hence it follows, that our ignorance of the extent of the powers of supernatural beings in performing things miraculous can be of no prejudice to us; because the divine perfections of God, his veracity, his fidelity, his sanctity, his goodness are our certain pledges, that he never will allow them to exert these powers, so as invincibly to deceive us and lead us into error.

(3.) *God cannot allow evil spirits to perform any relative miracle, known to be so, in attestation or defence of falsehood and error, when the circumstances are such that the performing of the miracle would inevitably lead men to believe the falsehood, and consequently induce them into error.* This proceeds upon the same grounds as the former axioms; for if mankind would be necessarily induced into error by the miracle performed, whether this arose from the greatness of the thing done, which had all the appearance of a divine miracle, or from the circumstances

circumstances in which the miracle was performed, and which necessarily induced men to believe it was from God : In either case, if God should permit such a miracle to be performed by evil spirits in favours of error, he would be equally guilty of acting against his own divine perfections : We have an example of this in the famous contest betwixt Elijah and the prophets of Baal : The question was, whether the Lord or Baal was the true God ? the people were divided in their hearts and *halted* (as the scripture expresses it) *between two opinions*. To settle their minds in the truth, Elijah proposed to refer the decision of the question to a miracle ; and the miracle he proposed was, that he on the part of God, and the prophets of Baal on his part, should each build an altar, and lay on it a victim, and call upon their respective Deities, and that the one who should send down fire from heaven to consume the victim should be esteemed the only true God ; and Elijah allowed the prophets of Baal to make the first trial. Now here it is to be observed ; *imo*, That the miracle proposed, of sending down fire to consume the victim, was certainly within the natural power of Satan ; for, we are assured, that he by God's permission sent down a great fire on Job's numerous flocks of sheep, and consumed them intirely, and all his servants, except one who escaped to tell him of the disaster : It is true, this servant, in relating what had happened, uses this expression, *the*

*fire of God hath fallen*; but the whole tenor of the narration shows that Satan was the immediate agent in all that happened to Job; for Almighty God expressly says, when he gave him permission to afflict Job, *Behold, all that he hath is in thy power, only upon himself put not forth thy hand*; and it is an usual expression in scripture to say, *the mountains of God, the cedars of God*, to express the greatness of these objects; besides, the scripture only relates here what Job's servant said, who seeing the dreadful fire that fell, and the mischief it did, but not knowing any thing of the cause of it, it was very natural for him to use that expression, and call it the fire of God. 2<sup>do</sup>, That Satan was here exceedingly interested to have the miracle performed; his worship was at stake, his honour engaged, and he must either stand or disgracefully fall, according as he does or does not perform it; we cannot then doubt either of his power, or of his good will to do it, if Almighty God had allowed him. 3<sup>tho</sup>, That as the case stood, if Satan had had been permitted to perform this miracle, when called upon for that purpose, the people must have been unavoidably led to, and confirmed in their idolatry; their minds were fluctuating, the whole regal power in the hands of an imperious heathen queen, was employed in support of idolatry; every worldly motive conspired to encourage the people to embrace it; the priests and prophets of God had been all destroyed except Elijah, who alone



lone appeared in defence of the true God ; but what was he alone against such a torrent ? He therefore appeals to a miracle ; he proposes such an one as he thought proper, and he allows the prophets of Baal to make the first trial : The whole people, anxious to see their doubts settled by so convincing an argument, readily embrace the proposal, determined to fix entirely on that side on which the miracle should be performed : From all which it is manifest, that had the devil been permitted to send down fire at the prayers of Baal's prophets, there could have been no remedy, the whole people must have been inevitably fixed in their idolatry ; the priests of Baal would have immediately triumphed, and ten to one but they would have fallen upon Elijah, and destroyed him without so much as giving him a hearing : And though they had been a little more patient, what could he have said ? He himself had put the matter to this test ; and it had declared in favours of his adversaries : he might say, I will obtain fire also on my victim ; but though he had done so, this would only have put both sides upon an equal footing, and been nothing at all to the main purpose of deciding the question ; and the people having no superior conviction in favour of the true God, and influenced by every worldly motive, besides their natural proneness to idolatry, must doubtless have continued in their idolatry, and given themselves up to it more and more. Wherefore, in these

circumstances, we see Almighty God restrained the natural power of Satan, and would by no means permit him to exert it in performing the miraculous operation proposed, which otherwise he could easily have done; because these circumstances were such, that had he been allowed to perform it, the consequences would have of necessity been so fatal to that poor people, and of course the permission itself would have been most contrary to the wisdom, veracity, goodness and mercy of God. The same arguments equally show, that what Almighty God did here he is no less bound to do in all similar cases; and that he never can allow wicked spirits to do such miraculous operations as are within the sphere of their natural powers, and known to be so, in favour of error, when the circumstances are such, that their doing so would necessarily seduce mankind into deception and error.

(4.) *If Almighty God, for his own wise and good ends, whether to try his servants or punish sinners, should at any time permit evil spirits, by means of their agents upon earth, to perform miraculous operations in favours of false doctrine, he is obliged by his own divine perfections to give mankind, at the same time, sufficient means to discover the delusion, and prevent their seduction from being inevitable. This is a natural and necessary consequence of the three preceeding axioms, and grounded upon the same reasons with them, and is what God Almighty*  
has

has actually done in all such cases as are recorded in the scripture, as we shall see by and by in answering the objections against the authority of miracles.

V. Though what I have here said can admit of no reply, and is fully sufficient to establish the truth of the above four axioms; yet, as it is of the highest importance to have them settled on the most solid foundation, I shall here subjoin one observation more to illustrate the whole, and place it in another clear point of view. All created beings without exception, having received from God whatever powers or faculties they possess, are totally dependent upon him, not only for their existence itself, and all their powers, but also for the exercise of them; so that they can never possibly exert them but by his will or permission; for to say they could act as they pleased, independently of God, or whether he would or not, would be to withdraw them from the being of *creatures*, and make them *gods* themselves. If therefore Almighty God should allow evil spirits to use the freedom of their own will without controul, and to exert all their natural faculties in deceiving mankind, by working for that purpose such amazing signs and wonders as could not possibly be distinguished from true miracles wrought by God himself, and of which mankind could not possibly discover the fallacy; in such a situation, what part could men act? what



side should or could they take? If they embrace the false doctrine attested by these delusive operations, they immediately become the dupes of the devil's malice, and their fall is unavoidable: if they refuse to submit to that light which carries with it such a splendor as persuades them it is from God; then they resist the highest evidence, they refuse subjection to what they are convinced in their own hearts is the will of their Creator; and consequently, in this case also, their ruin is infallible. Would God be a God of infinite goodness and love to his creatures, should he allow poor helpless man to be thus miserably imposed upon, and reduced to such a sad dilemma? Again, considering the evident and necessary connection which reason clearly perceives between miracles wrought by God to attest the truth of any doctrine, and the truth of that doctrine itself, and considering the almost irresistible force that the perception of this connection has over the mind of man, for convincing us of the truth of any doctrine so attested; it may justly be said, that there cannot be a more convincing proof of the truth of any doctrine than a miracle wrought by God for that purpose; and therefore, that miracles are truly the language of God, by which he speaks to man, and the seal of heaven by which divine truths are authenticated and confirmed. If therefore we suppose, that Almighty God should allow evil spirits to speak in this language, in order to deceive mankind, and to use this seal, thereby to give a sanction

sanction to falsehood and error; *that is*, should he allow them to work miracles in attestation of false doctrine, of such a kind, and in such circumstances, as should give them all the appearance of divine miracles, and leave no possible means for mankind to discover the delusion, what must be the consequence? It is evident, that in this case mankind would of necessity be induced into error; falsehood and lies would be propagated and patronized, and the language of God and seal of heaven would be the means of doing so. Would God be a God of truth, a God of fidelity, a God of holiness, did he permit this to be done, and allow his name to give such a sanction to error? Hence then, we justly conclude, that these four axioms cannot be contested, without at the same time calling in question the goodness, veracity and sanctity of the Deity; they stand upon the same base with these divine perfections, and both must stand or fall together.

VI. From these axioms, grounded on such a solid foundation, the *criterion* we are in quest of, or the rules by which we can certainly know what miraculous operations are, and what are not, from God, when wrought in defence of doctrine, will easily appear, and are as follows:

First rule: "When any miracle is performed  
" which evidently implies an act, either of almighty  
" power,

"power, or of infinite wisdom, such a miracle carries its own proof in its bosom, that it is the work of God."

This rule needs no explication; it is evident in its terms; but it will be proper here to consider a little more minutely, what particular kinds of miracles fall under this head. And first, with regard to omnipotence; a miraculous operation may require the power of God to perform it, either from the thing done, or from the manner of doing it. Of the first class are these following: (1.) The real transmutation, or change of one substance into another, such as the change of Moses's rod into a serpent; of the waters of Egypt into blood; and of the water, at the marriage of Cana, into wine. These were real changes of substance; the work of the almighty power of God, who having at the beginning created all things out of nothing, can alone, in an instant, change one thing into another. As for the rods of the magicians, which they are said to have changed also into serpents, this was not a real change of substance, but either a substitution of one thing for another, or, at most, an apparent change, the work of enchantment and fascination. (2.) The raising a dead man to life; which may be considered as a kind of creation, being a production of life where there was none, and which supposes in the agent an absolute dominion both over the soul and body of man, so as to be capable



capable of re-uniting them together in one living principle of action and sensation, after they had been, by the dissolution of the body, entirely separated from one another. Now, we can scarcely conceive any creature to have such an absolute dominion over the soul and body of man; but as God alone at the beginning breathed into the human body *the breath of life*, so it would seem impossible for any creature to do that again by its own natural strength, when once God had been pleased to take that breath away. (3.) The restoring members, such as legs, arms, eyes, or the like, to those who had lost them, or giving them to those who never had them. (4.) Dispossessing the devil; which implies a power far superior to Satan, as our Saviour justly argues against those who pretended that he cast out devils by the power of the devil. (5.) The power of replication, or of multiplying any bodily substance, and making it be in different places at the same time. These and other such operations seem clearly to be the proper work of the almighty power of God; and we shall afterwards see they are declared to be so by God himself in his holy scriptures. The manner also by which a miracle is performed, may show it to be the work of omnipotence, when it is evidently above all created power, and it is then such when the effect is produced by the simple act of the will in the agent, and that instantaneously and perfectly. The light of reason clearly shows, that no  
created

created being in nature can have such power over any other creatures, as to make it act or produce any physical effect merely by willing it should do so, whether this will be expressed outwardly or not: This is a prerogative which solely belongs to the Creator, who at the beginning said, *Let the light be made; and immediately*, obedient to his holy will, *the light was made*; and who, when he cleansed the poor man of the leprosy, Matt. viii. said, *I will, be thou cleansed; and immediately*, in an instant, obedient to his almighty will, *his leprosy was cleansed*. When any natural agent wants to produce a physical effect upon any creature, he must act upon that other physically, and use, perhaps, the help of other creatures, as means or instruments to do so, and have some time before the effect be produced; it is not enough that he wills it, his willing it alone will not be sufficient to perform it. Hence therefore, to produce any such effect by the sole act of the will, can belong to him alone, who by his sole will at first created all things out of nothing, and to whose almighty will alone all things are perfectly subjected. Hence, many of those effects which may be brought about without any miracle by ordinary means, and by the help of natural causes, do yet become real miracles, and such as are proper only to almighty power, when they are performed without all help of natural causes, and in an instant, at the sole desire, command, or will of the person by whose means they are performed: On this

this account, the giving of sight to the blind, cleansing the lepers, curing the deaf, healing the sick, and the like, which may be brought about in time by the use of medicines, when performed all at once, as our blessed Saviour did, by his touch, or command, or the simple act of his will, and in a perfect and permanent manner, are evidently the work of the divine power, and far superior to the ability of all created agents. But if the thing performed be itself a work proper to omnipotence, as those above-mentioned; for example, the raising of a dead man to life, and it be performed in this manner, instantaneously by the sole act of the will; this will give a double lustre to such miracles, and show them above all contradiction to be the work of the Almighty God.

VII. A miracle is also proved to be the work of God alone, when it is evidently an effect of infinite wisdom. There are two particulars which come under this head; namely, penetrating into the heart of man, so as to discover his most secret thoughts, and knowing future contingent events, which solely depend on the free will of others. We do not see a manifest impossibility that a created intelligence should be so extensive as to be able to see and comprehend all those things, which at present have an actual existence in nature, of understanding their properties, causes, relations, effects, and the like; as also, those actions of men  
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which are any how manifested outwardly : But to penetrate into the heart of man, to understand his most secret thoughts, and those simple acts which arise from, and solely depend upon his free will, much more to foretel what will be the acts of his free-will in after-times, and even of those who are yet unborn, and what they will say and do in consequence of their free choice ; all this, as is plain from the bare proposal of it, is far beyond the utmost reach of all created intelligences, and is competent to that great Being alone, who having at first created the heart of man, knows perfectly well all that he is capable of willing and thinking, all that he actually does will, or think, and all he afterwards will think or do, for all eternity. Wherefore, the discovering the secret thoughts of the heart of man, and the foretelling with certainty future contingent events, many ages before they happen, are miracles which exceed all created knowledge, and are proper to God alone.

VIII. There remains another rule for knowing what miracles properly belong to almighty power alone ; namely, the sacred scriptures : For, when these divine oracles ascribe any miraculous operation to God alone, as a thing *proper* to his almighty power, this must be a most convincing proof to all those who believe the scriptures to be the word of God, that such miracles are above the power of  
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all created agents. Now, from this unerring guide, we draw an ample confirmation of all we have advanced above on this subject, and find that each of the particular miracles, which we have seen by the light of reason, can be attributed to no cause less than infinite power or infinite wisdom, are in these sacred oracles expressly declared to be operations competent to none but the Almighty Creator. Let us examine some of the most remarkable,

1. *Raising the dead to life.* Of this Almighty God says of himself, *See now that I, even I am he, and there is no God with me; I kill and I make alive, I wound and I heal,* Deut. xxxii. 39. where his being the only author of life is appealed to as a proof of his being the only God. Hannah, the mother of Samuel, in her hymn of thanksgiving for her son, acknowledges the same truth, *The Lord killeth and maketh alive, he bringeth down to the grave and bringeth up,* 1 Sam. ii. 6. In the book of Wisdom the same truth is beautifully expressed thus, *For it is thou, O Lord, that hast power of life and death, and ledest down to the gates of death, and bringest back again,* Wisd. xvi. 13. In the New Testament the proofs of this are very strong and conclusive. When our Saviour had cured the sick man upon the Sabbath-day, who had been labouring under his infirmity for thirty-eight years, and upon that occasion had

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declared

declared himself to be the Son of God, the Jews sought to kill him, both for breaking the Sabbath by curing upon it, and for making himself equal to God. All he said in his own defence was an appeal to his works, and particularly mentions raising the dead as superior to all the rest, and by which, as being a work proper to the Father, he, having the power of performing it, proves himself equal to the Father; *For, says he, as the Father raiseth up the dead and quickeneth them, even so the Son quickeneth whom he will, John v. 21.* And a little after he adds, *The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and they that hear shall live; for as the Father hath life in himself, so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself, ver. 25.* In which words we see the power of raising the dead to life is declared to be a power proper to God, and his great prerogative; and its being given by the Father to the Son is assigned as the cause why the dead shall be restored to life at hearing the voice of the Son, and consequently, as a convincing proof that Jesus Christ, at whose voice the dead were actually raised to life, is this very Son of God. Now all this reasoning would have been very inconclusive if the power of raising the dead had been competent to any creature. In like manner, when our Saviour raised Lazarus, he did it on purpose to convince those present that he was sent from God, which it could never have

done



done if the raising the dead had not been a miracle proper to the almighty power of God. Lastly, not only the poor widow of Zarephath was convinced that *Elijah was a man of God, and that the word of the Lord was true in his mouth*, when she saw her son dead restored to life by his means; but also when our Saviour raised the widow's son of Nain, the whole people present were persuaded this was the work of God; for *there came a great fear upon all, and they glorified God saying, a great prophet is risen up amongst us, and God has visited his people*, Luke vii. 16.

2. *Restoring members to those that want them.*

This also in scripture is attributed solely to God as a work proper to him alone. When the apostles asked our blessed Saviour about the man born blind, whether this was in punishment of his own sins or of those of his parents, he answered *neither, but that the works of God might be made manifest in him*, John ix. 3. Consequently, to give sight to one born blind is properly the work of God, above the power of any creature; and this man was born without his sight, on purpose to manifest the work of God in him by receiving it: and, indeed, this miracle was so evident a proof of the finger of God, that the Pharisees were confounded by it, and knew not what to say against it; their pride would not allow them to yield to its conviction, and they fell out among themselves dis-

puting about it, whilst the poor man himself, sensible of the greatness of the miracle, cries out before them all, *since the world began it was not heard that any man opened the eyes of one born blind; if this man was not of God he could do nothing.*

3. The performing miracles *in an instant by the sole act of the will*, is not only attributed to the power of God alone in the holy scriptures, but to these, in a particular manner, our Saviour appeals as proofs of his being the Messias, in his answer to St John the Baptist; for the most of the cures mentioned in that answer were *miraculous only in the manner*, and would have been very inconclusive proofs of his being the Messias, if they could be performed in that manner by any creature. Also Jesus Christ declares, that the works which he did *were given him by his father to do*, and that *they bear witness to him that the father had sent him*, John v. 36. And in another place he says, *If I do not the works of my father, believe me not; but if I do, though you believe not me, believe the works, that ye may know and believe that the father is in me and I in him*, John x. 37. In which texts he expressly affirms his works to be the works of his father, and incontestible proofs of his mission; now the generality of the works which he did, and to which he here appeals, were such as might be brought about in time by the help of natural means, but were miraculous, and  
such

such as God alone can perform, only on account of their being done without any natural means, in an instant, at his command and the sole act of his will.

4. As to the two acts of omniscience, the knowledge of the secrets of the heart of man, and foreseeing things to come, these also in scripture are in a particular manner attributed to God alone. With regard to the first, Almighty God expressly claims it to himself as his own proper prerogative, *The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked, who can know it? I the Lord search the heart and try the reins*, Jer. xvii. 9. 10. Solomon also in the Proverbs declares the same in very strong terms: *Hell and destruction are before the Lord; how much more then the hearts of the children of men?* Prov. xv. 11. And still more expressly in his prayer at the dedication of the temple, *For thou, even thou only knowest the hearts of all the children of men*, 1 Kings viii. 39. And as for the knowledge of futurity, it is so essentially proper to God only, that he himself challenges the Gods of the heathens to foretell what is to come, and promises to acknowledge them as gods if they do so, *Produce your cause, saith the Lord; bring forth your strong reasons, saith the King of Jacob: Let them bring them forth and show us what shall happen—or declare to us things for to come; show the things that are to come hereafter, that we*



*may know that ye are gods, Isaiah xli. 21. This needs no application.*

IX. From what has been said under this first rule of the Criterion, it appears that miracles of this order need no extrinsical proofs of their being the work of God; they carry the conviction of this along with them; wherever they have been performed they have conquered at sight, and convinced the minds of the spectators that they were the work of the Almighty. But to take away all pretence of ambiguity from them, we need only apply to them, as well as to all others, the other rules of the Criterion which I am going to explain, and which cannot fail to give the most entire satisfaction.

X. Second Rule: "When any miraculous operation is performed, which has all the appearance of being the work of God, and which cannot be known by men to be within the power of created agents, though perhaps in itself it may be so; such a miracle is certainly either the work of God, or of good angels commissioned and authorised by him."

This is a necessary consequence of the second axiom; and, in fact, such miracles as we here speak of are, with regard to man, to all intents and purposes, the same as those of the former rule;

rule ; for they must appear to man to be as much the work of God, and consequently make as deep an impression on his heart as those which can only be done by God himself. Now, as it is evidently impossible that God should permit evil spirits to work such miraculous operations in defence of error, as mankind could not possibly discover from the works of God, it therefore follows, that all such operations are to be esteemed either as the immediate operation of God himself, or as done by positive commission from him, and are therefore to be considered in the same light as those of the former rule.

XI. Third Rule : “ When any new doctrine “ is taught as coming from God, and the teacher “ works miracles *in the name of God*, and by *invoking him* to perform them in attestation of “ his commission, and of the doctrine he teaches, “ such miracles are certainly the work of God, “ and done by authority from him.”

All the principles and axioms above-established conspire to prove the justness of this rule, and plainly show that, in the case proposed, it is impossible Almighty God should either himself perform the miracle or permit any creature to do it, if the teacher of this new doctrine be not commissioned by him to teach it. The reason is plain,

plain, because if he acted otherwise, *that is*, if either he himself performed the miracle demanded, or allowed any other to do it, though the teacher was an impostor and his doctrine false; this would evidently be to allow his name, his language, and his seal to be used in defence of a lie, and infallibly to induce men into error. Let us explain the case: I pretend to be sent by God, and I am not; I teach a doctrine which I protest was revealed by God to me, whilst I know it was not; or, if you please, deluded by the enthusiastic frenzy of a heated imagination, I fancy myself to be sent by God to teach a doctrine which I falsely imagine he had revealed to me, and I call upon God to work a miracle to attest that what I say is true: Is it not repugnant to the very idea we have of God, to suppose that he would grant my petition in either case proposed, and work the miracle I demand? It certainly is so. Let us suppose again that I had a compact with the devil to perform the miracle, and that my calling upon God is only a pretence, the more easily to gain credit; but that upon my doing so, Satan engages to do what I ask; is it not here also evidently impossible that God should allow the devil to do any thing miraculous in these circumstances? would not such permission be equally concurring to patronize error and falsehood, as if he had wrought the miracle himself? Hence then we may justly conclude, that any miracle performed in the name of Almighty



Almighty God, and by calling upon him, is most undoubtedly the work either of God himself, or of those who are commissioned and authorised by him. When a person openly opposes himself to God, or to his known truth, we easily see that God, for his own wise ends, may permit the devil in this case, by means of such a person, to perform signs and wonders; but there is plenty of resource against the delusion, which carries in its front its own condemnation: But if a person should pretend to be sent from God, and under that pretence teach false doctrine, and work miracles to prove what he teaches, it is plain, that in this case there is no resource, our ruin and seduction are inevitable, and God himself becomes the abettor of falsehood, and the cause of our fall; it is therefore impossible in such circumstances that Almighty God should ever allow any thing miraculous to be done at all; and consequently that a miracle performed in his name, and by calling upon him, is most assuredly the work of his hand.

XII. What I have here said is fully confirmed by the example of Jesus Christ, who appeals to this very rule as the criterion by which to prove that the miracles wrought by him were the works of his Father; *The works that I do, says he, IN MY FATHER'S NAME, bear witness of me that the Father hath sent me, John x. 25.* And when he was about to raise Lazarus to life, addressing himself to his Father, he said,

said, *Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me, and I know that thou hearest me always; but because of the people that stand by, I said it, that they may believe that thou hast sent me,* John xi. 41. 42.

In the former of these texts, he expressly asserts that his doing his works in his Father's name is a full and sufficient testimony of his being sent by him, and consequently that their being done in his name is a full proof that he is the author of them. In the other text, having prayed to his Father to grant his request in raising up Lazarus, he thanks him for hearing him before all present, and expressly declares he does so, that they, seeing this miracle performed by invoking Almighty God, might thereby be convinced that he was sent by his Father, and consequently that the miracle he wrought by calling upon God, and acknowledging it to be from him, was, by that very circumstance, undoubtedly proved to be his work. After our Saviour's ascension, the apostles, taught by their Master's example, took the same method to convince the world that Jesus Christ was true God, and really risen from the dead, as they preached, by working miracles in his name. Thus, when St Peter restored the poor cripple beggar to the use of his feet, he said, *In THE NAME of Jesus of Nazareth, arise and walk,* Acts iii. 6. And when the people all ran together marvelling at so extraordinary a miracle, he first took occasion to declare to them that Jesus is the Son of God, and risen from  
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the dead; and then adds, in proof of this, *AND HIS NAME, through faith in his name, hath made this man strong whom ye see and know*, ver. 16. In which words we see that the doing this miracle is given as the very reason to prove that he is the Son of God, and the miracle itself is proved to be his work, because done in his name; nay, Jesus Christ himself, when he gave his apostles commission to preach his gospel, and gave them the power of working miracles in its confirmation, declares, at the same time, that these miracles should be done in his name, *IN MY NAME they shall cast out devils, they shall speak with new tongues*, &c. Mark xvi. thereby plainly intimating that their being done in his name would be the proof that he was the author of them. From all which we justly conclude, that Almighty God never will, nor can permit any miracles to be performed in his name, but when he himself is the author of them.

**XIII. Fourth Rule:** “When any point of doctrine, believed to have been formerly revealed, comes afterwards to be denied or called in question; if any person shall, in the name of God, and by invoking him, perform a miracle in attestation of either side of the doubt, such miracle is undoubtedly from God.”

This rule stands upon the same foundation as the one last mentioned, and, strictly speaking, they may



may both be considered only as two cases belonging to the same rule; for the self-same reasons, which show that Almighty God will never allow his sacred name to be used by any impostor, who falsely pretends to be sent by him, and teaches new doctrines, with no less evidence convince us that he never will allow it to be used in defence of any kind of false doctrine, however it may be believed to be true, and have been received as such: and therefore, in the case proposed, where a dispute arises about any received point of doctrine, if a miracle should be wrought in the name of God to attest either side of the question, that miracle is undoubtedly from God, and must decide the controversy. The case of Elijah and the prophets of Baal comes in exactly here: The old received belief of the people of Israel was, that the Lord was the only true God; but for some time past, by the authority and politics of their kings, they had been induced to forsake the service of the Lord, and worship the idol Baal as the true God; many, from their natural proneness to idolatry, had gone headlong into this delusion; some few had preserved their integrity, and not bowed their knee to Baal, and great multitudes fluctuated in their minds, and halted between the two opinions: At last the decision of the question is put to the test of a miracle, and the event shows the truth of the rule we have before us, *viz.* that in such cases God Almighty never will allow any miraculous

raculous operation to be performed in the name of the true God, but what is actually from him, and in defence of his truth. We must, however, further observe in this place, that, if the former revelation of the received opinion be grounded on sufficient authority, it is not incumbent on Almighty God to work a miracle in its defence when called in question; and therefore the want of a miracle, though demanded in attestation of the received doctrine, is no proof, nor even presumption against it. The people of Israel, in the days of Elijah, were inexcusable in admitting a doubt about who was the true God, considering by what convincing arguments the Lord had proved himself to their fathers to be so, and therefore he was nowise obliged to work another miracle to them to attest his divinity, though he was obliged not to allow the devil to work one in his own favours. What God did then on this occasion was the effect of his infinite goodness, condescending to the weakness and misery of these poor people. But the case is very different with those who call in question or deny any article which is already received as a truth formerly revealed by God: This denial is a new doctrine, a doctrine tending to overturn what is believed to be a divine truth; and as nothing less than a divine authority can be sufficient to destroy a truth believed on sufficient grounds to be divine, and revealed by God, therefore whoever attacks any such received doctrine, or its revelation,

is obliged to prove that he is commissioned and authorised by God to do so, especially if, in fact, he pretends himself to be sent by God for that end : And as miracles are the proper proofs of such commission, and the usual credentials given by Almighty God to those whom he sends on such errands, it is therefore justly demanded of all such innovators to perform miracles in proof of their mission ; and their not being able to do so is a just presumption against them, if not their entire condemnation. Upon this ground it was that the Catholic church challenged Luther and the other reforming apostles to prove their pretended mission by miracles ; had they been what they pretended to be, commissioned and authorised by God to reform the doctrine of the church, to condemn as falsehoods so many articles of her faith, and to reject as errors such a number of points which had for time immemorial been received as truths formerly revealed by God, it is clear in this case that Almighty God was obliged to give unquestionable proofs that he had sent them, and to prove their commission to be divine by working miracles for this purpose. The church therefore with reason demanded this proof from them, and as they never were able to give what she demanded, she justly rejected them as impostors, and condemned their novelties as false doctrine and heresy.

XIV. Fifth



XIV. Fifth rule: " If the miracles have been  
" foretold by prophecy, long before they were per-  
" formed, and afterwards were performed in the  
" very same manner in which they were foretold,  
" this is another convincing proof that such miracles  
" are from God."

As this rule contains three several cases, we must consider them separately, in order to unfold the full sense and meaning of it.

The first case regards prophecy itself considered as a miracle, and as an undoubted proof of the finger of God. We have seen above, that to fore-know and foretell future contingent events, especially for any considerable time before they happen, is the prerogative of God alone, who perfectly well knows all things past, present, and to come; but I observed at the same time, that superior beings, from their more intimate knowledge of the secrets of nature, from their own greater sagacity in penetrating the humours, inclinations, and various dispositions of the human heart, or from what they have resolved to do themselves, by God's permission, can, on many occasions, fore-know and foretell, by their visible agents, things to come, not only necessary events with certainty, but even such as are contingent with a very high probability, which will seldom fail to be accomplished. Suppose then an impostor assisted and instruct-

ed by evil spirits should endeavour by such prophecies to delude mankind, how shall we discover the delusion, and know for certain when these prophecies are from God, or from the devil? The rule given above for other miracles is particularly to be applied here, *to wit*, "If the prophecy be made 'in the name of God, and is afterwards verified by 'its accomplishment, that prophecy is doubtless 'from God.'" This is the very rule given by God himself as the infallible criterion of the divinity of a prophecy, *The prophet which shall presume to speak a word in my name, which I have not commanded him to speak—even that prophet shall die. And if thou say in thine heart, how shall we know the word which the Lord hath not spoken? when a prophet speaketh in the name of the Lord, if the thing follow not, nor come to pass, that is the thing which the Lord hath not spoken, Deut. xviii. 20, 21, 22.* And consequently, by a necessary illation, "if the thing follow and come to pass, that is the 'thing which the Lord hath spoken." The reason is plain, from what we have said above at large, founded on this evident truth, that *Almighty God never will, nor, consistent with his own divine perfections, ever can permit his sacred name to be made use of to patronize error or promote falsehood.*

The second case regards all other miraculous facts as foretold by prophecy, and may be expressed thus: "When any miraculous operations  
which

‘ which are performed had been foretold long before they happened, and were foretold in the name of the living God, and as miracles which were to be wrought by him, by means of persons commissioned and sent by him ; this also is a most incontestible proof that these miracles, when they actually do happen as they had been foretold, are from God.” This was a most glorious prerogative which the miracles of Christ possessed, that they had been foretold by the prophets in the name of the Lord, some hundred years before he came into the world ; and from this is drawn a most unanswerable proof that Christ is the true God, which Origen very justly argues against Celsus. Isaiah, some ages before Christ, had foretold that God himself would come amongst us to save us, and that he would restore sight to the blind, hearing to the deaf, strength to the weak, and the like ; *They shall see the glory of the Lord, and the excellency of our God ; strengthen ye the weak hands, and confirm the feeble knees ; say to them that are of a feeble heart, Be strong, fear not, behold your God will come with vengeance, even God with a recompence ; he will come and save you ; then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped ; then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb shall sing, Is. xxxv.* After a great number of years Christ appears in the world ; he declares himself to be the Son of God, and that he



is come to seek and to save those that were lost; and as a proof that what he says is true, he performs all those very miracles that were foretold of the Saviour by the prophet: As therefore none but God could foretell such events so long before, as this prophecy was made in the name of God, as it was literally fulfilled in the person of Jesus Christ, therefore we justly conclude his miracles are from God, and he himself is that very God whom the prophet foretold would come to save us, and work these very miracles he did in proof of his divinity.

*If it should be objected, says St Irenæus, that the devil had done things (miracles) of this kind by illusions, we carry them back to the prophecies, and will demonstrate from them that all things had been most exactly performed by Jesus Christ as they had been foretold, and that he alone is the Son of God, Iren. lib. 2. contr. Hær. c. 32. And indeed it must be owned that this argument is the most convincing refutation of what both Jews and Heathens alledged against the miracles of our Saviour, in pretending that they were done by art magic, and by the help of the devil. St Augustine displays this argument very beautifully: The prophetic testimony accompanies the preaching of the apostolic doctrine. To prevent what the apostles announced from being despised, these things were shown to have been foretold by the prophets; for though they appealed to their*  
miracles

miracles, there would not have been wanting then, as there are not wanting now, such as would ascribe them all to magical powers, had not such a thought been overpowered by the testimony of the prophets; for none, sure, will say, that they had by art magic provided prophets beforehand to foretell their miracles, and this long before they were born themselves, lib. xii. contr. Faust. Also in his sermon xxvii. on the words of the apostle, he inculcates the same argument very beautifully: *Who of us, says he, does not wonder at the saying of an apostle that prophecy is more firm and sure than a voice from heaven? Observe he said, it was more sure, not better, nor truer; for that word from heaven was as true as the prophetic word, and as good and as profitable. How then more sure, unless more apt to convince the bearer? and why more apt? because there are infidels so injurious to Christ as to say, that he wrought his miracles by art magic—who might also refer the voice from heaven to the same art: But the prophets were not only before this same voice, but before Christ was born in the flesh. Christ sent his prophets before he had assumed our flesh; who so then says that he was a magician, and as such made himself to be worshipped even after his death, will he also say, that he was a magician before he was born? You see the reason why the Apostle says, we have a more sure word of prophecy. The voice from heaven was to admonish the faithful; the prophetic word, to convince the infidel.*

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The third case regards those miracles which the person himself foretells before-hand that he is to perform, and even leaves to others to appoint the circumstances of time, place, and manner of working them, or even to ask what miracle they please, and foretells he will do in all that according as they shall please to determine; when then in fact he does so, this is also an undoubted proof that miracles so wrought are done by the power of God, and the one who so performs them is sent by him. On this account the miracles of Moses carried along with them the proof of their being from God, because, as we have above seen at large, he foretold Pharaoh what he was to do, to punish him, and when he was again to deliver him; nay, he sometimes left to Pharaoh himself to appoint the very hour of his deliverance, and delivered him accordingly at the very hour appointed. Thus also Isaiah left it to Hezekiah's own choice, whether the sun should advance or go back ten degrees upon the dial, as a proof that what the prophet told him of the recovery of his health was true, 2 Kings xx. 9. Miracles of this kind carry conviction along with them that they are from God, because they show the power that works them is altogether unlimited, and able to perform whatever is demanded, and in whatever manner, which evidently belongs to God alone.



XV. Sixth Rule : " When the doctrine attest-  
 " ed by the miracles is either conformable to the  
 " known truth, as when they are performed in  
 " defence of it when impugned ; or, if it be new  
 " doctrine, that it be not manifestly contrary to  
 " the known truth and subversive of it, this gives  
 " a good presumption that the miracles are from  
 " God ; but when the doctrine is contrary to, or  
 " subversive of the known truth, this is a certain  
 " proof that the miracles are not from God."

This rule brings us to the examination of a point of no small importance in this subject, *to wit*, whether or not, and in what manner miracles are proved by doctrine ? I find different authors treat this question differently, according to the point they have in view to prove, or to the light in which they apprehend it : Some argue universally that miracles are a certain proof of doctrine, and that their authority is independent of the doctrine and of the circumstances which accompany it. See the authors of the vindication of the Christian religion against Rousseau, p. 173. Others again contend that miracles are not always of themselves infallible proofs of doctrine, but that the miracles and the doctrine mutually support and justify one another, See Houteville *Rel. Chret. prouvée par les faits*, liv. 3, 8me difficulté. Both sides have reason, according to their view of the matter ; but it is necessary to analyse the question, that we may  
 see

see the precise sense in which the above rule takes place.

First then, if a miracle be performed in attestation of any point of doctrine, and we know for certain by any of the above rules that that miracle is the work of God, then without all doubt such a miracle is a full, perfect, and incontestible proof that the doctrine attested by it is true. This we have proved at large in the preceding chapter, *on the authority of miracles*: In this sense, then, the authors of the vindication have reason to assert, that true miracles, or miracles wrought by God, are certain proofs of doctrine; and that their authority is quite independent on the doctrine attested by them, or any circumstances attending it. Nor is it to the purpose to alledge here, *what if the doctrine so attested be evidently bad doctrine, and contrary to the known truth?* This is an impossible supposition, for God Almighty never will, nor can work a miracle in testimony of bad doctrine; if therefore we know for certain that the miracle is the work of God, we must be equally certain that the doctrine attested by it is his also.

Secondly, When we are not certain whether the miraculous fact performed be from God, or from Satan, but find nothing in the doctrine attested by it contrary to the known truth: In this case the doctrine, though good, is not an absolute proof

proof that the miracle is the work of God; because there is a possibility that Satan, who often transforms himself into an angel of light the better to deceive, may, by his agents, perform miracles in favours of true doctrine, the better thereby to gain credit and lead astray; but yet the innocence of the doctrine is a strong presumption in favours of the miracle, especially if there be no positive reasons to suspect it. This however is a case of which the solution will easily be got from the other attending circumstances, as some or other of the foregoing rules of the criterion will never be wanting when the miracle is from God.

But, thirdly, When the doctrine is evidently bad, and contrary to the known truth, then this is an undoubted proof that the miracle wrought in attestation of such doctrine is not from God; but, like the false doctrine it attests, is the work of Satan. This is in a manner self-evident, and a natural and necessary consequence of all the principles and reasonings we have laid down, both in this chapter and before on the authority of miracles; for God cannot contradict himself; he cannot use his power to promote falsehood, or patronize error; whenever then we see that the doctrine attested by a miracle is certainly false, that is an undoubted sign the dubious miracle is not the work of God: In this sense, then, what Houteville asserts is true, that the miracle and doctrine mutually



ally support one another; namely, when we are certain the miracle is from God, but doubt about the truth of the doctrine; the miracle in this case undoubtedly proves the truth of the doctrine, and when we are certain the doctrine is bad, and doubt of the miracle, the badness of the doctrine evidently proves the miracle is not from God. Upon the whole, then, it appears that this sixth rule of our criterion is, properly speaking, calculated solely to ascertain false miracles by false doctrine; when we are dubious about the miracle, and from what source it proceeds; but it is not alone a proper criterion to distinguish with certainty the nature of the miracle when the doctrine is good or indifferent.

It was necessary, however, to mention and explain it here, because we find that Almighty God makes particular use of this third part of it for the direction of his people against seduction, both in the Old and New Testament, which it will be proper to consider a little more particularly.

XVI. When God revealed his law and religion to his people by the hands of Moses, he did it in such a manner as left not the smallest doubt of his being the author of it; the miracles he wrought were so stupenduous in themselves, so frequently repeated, and in such circumstances, as to give the most entire conviction that they were performed  
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by him, and consequently that the doctrine attested by them was most certainly the doctrine of God, and therefore true : At the same time he perfectly well knew, that whatever attempts the devil would afterwards make to corrupt the minds of his people, and lead them off from his service by means of his emissaries, he never would be able to work any miracles in proof of his false doctrine, equal, or in the smallest degree, comparable to what he himself had done in favour of the truth ; but that all the attempts the devil might make of this kind, would be only lying signs and false miracles ; for this reason, then, he cautions his people against them ; and the plain rule he gave by which to discover the falsity of such pretended miracles, and which was fully adapted to the meanest capacity, was the one we are here treating of, *if they tended to lead them away from his service* : The falsity and evil tendency of the doctrine, contrary to the known truth which he had revealed to their fathers, was the infallible touchstone by which to discover the falsity of all such miracles. *If there arise among you a prophet, or a dreamer of dreams, and giveth thee a sign or a wonder ; and the sign or the wonder come to pass whereof he spake unto thee, saying, Let us go after other gods, and let us serve them : Thou shalt not hearken unto the words of that prophet, or that dreamer of dreams ; for the Lord your God proveth you to know whether you love the Lord your God, with all your heart, and with all your*

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soul,

*soul*, Deut. xiii. 1. In these words we see, *1mo*, The case proposed, of a false prophet wanting to seduce the people from the service of God. *2do*, The supposition made, that he even works a sign or a wonder to persuade them to follow his seduction. *3tio*, The conduct which God demands of them on such an occasion, which is, absolutely to reject and not to hear such a prophet, notwithstanding his sign or wonder. *4to*, The view God has in permitting such attempts to seduce them; which is in order to try them, to prove them, and to see if they be faithful to him. From which we may justly conclude, that whatever signs or wonders such false prophets could use to enforce their false doctrine, they will always be in no degree comparable to those by which Almighty God established his truth; and that the doctrine they proposed being contrary to the known truth, this alone was a perfectly good reason to reject them intirely: Nay, in the following verse, God commands the seducing prophet to be put to death, notwithstanding all his signs, and gives this only reason, both for rejecting his proposal and punishing himself so severely, *because he hath spoken to turn you away from the Lord your God, that brought you out of the land of Egypt, and redeemed you out of the house of bondage*, ver. 5. thereby plainly insinuating, that their delivery out of Egypt amidst such manifest miracles wrought by the hand of God, ought by far to overbalance all the false miracles



racles that might afterwards be brought to seduce them from their allegiance to him.

XVII. In the new law, as our blessed Saviour established his doctrine by miracles far superior to those of Moses, and to which likewise all those of Moses and the prophets concurred; for this reason he declares to us, by the mouth of his holy apostle St Paul, that if an angel from heaven should come and teach any other gospel than what he taught, any thing contrary to the known truth so revealed by Christ and his apostles, and by them preached to the world; this circumstance alone was enough to make us reject him as a false teacher, and as one accursed by God, Gal. i. 8 And upon these grounds he requires the same conduct from us as God did in the old law, when false teachers arise: *If any man shall say unto you, lo, here is Christ, or there, believe it not; for there shall arise false Christs and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders, in so much, that if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect.*—Behold, I have told you before, Matth. xxiv. 23, &c. where we see, that the infallible rule to discover the delusion of their great signs and wonders, is, that they teach falsehood contrary to the known truth revealed by Jesus Christ, and established by his amazing miracles as by far overbalance whatever afterwards wrought by those seducers in proof of their false Christs, and false doctrine. Hence we

see, that this sixth rule of our criterion, though not directly calculated to discover true miracles, yet is a most infallible means to discover such as are false, however great or amazing they may appear to be; and we see it is used and recommended by Almighty God in the old law, and by our blessed Saviour in the new, for this very purpose.

XVIII. To these six rules which compose the criterion by which we may with all security judge when a miraculous operation is from God, I shall here subjoin the general character of divine miracles; which, though not an absolute proof alone, yet, when added to the criterion, greatly confirms its decisions. Now it is a just observation, that divine miracles, generally speaking, always tend to, and promote the good of mankind, either for soul or body, or both: they are the effects of goodness as well as of power; but these performed by the devil, are either indifferent, neither good nor ill to man; or, which is most commonly the case, consist in doing evil: they are the effects of power and malice, but never of goodness; nay, the doing good to mankind, the promoting their happiness seems so connected with divine miracles alone, that when the emissaries of Satan or teachers of false doctrine attempt such, even though in the name of Christ, they are baffled and disappointed. Thus we are told, that when *certain vagabond Jews took upon them to call over them who had evil spirits the name*  
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of the Lord Jesus, saying, *We adjure you by Jesus whom Paul preacheth; the evil spirit answered and said, Jesus I know, and Paul I know, but who are ye? And the man in whom the evil spirit was, leaped upon them, and overcame them, and prevailed against them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded, Acts xix.* An accident of the same kind is related of Luther by Staphilus; who was an eyewitness of it; and the fatal consequence of the attempt made by Calvin to raise a pretended dead man to life, by which the poor man actually died, is well known to all who are acquainted with his history. See his life by Boscus, who relates it at large.

St Irenæus takes particular notice of this character of divine miracles in opposition to those of Satan; the heretics of his time attempted to gain credit to their false tenets by the effects of magic, which they vaunted of as miracles performed to confirm their doctrines; of these the saint speaks thus: *Moreover, the followers of Simon and Carpocrates, and whoever else are said to work miracles, will be convicted of not performing what they do by the power of God, nor in truth, nor to the advantage of men, but to their ruin, and to deceive them by magical illusions, and rather to hurt them by all kind of impostures, than to benefit those whom they seduce to believe their errors. For, they cannot give sight to the blind, nor hearing to the deaf,*



*nor put to flight all devils, except those whom they have brought on, if they even do this.—And they are so far from raising the dead, as our Lord did, and the apostles by prayer, and as is most frequently done among the brethren, that they even think it impossible, &c. Irenæus, lib. ii. cap. 57.*

XIX. Another common character of divine miracles is, that they are generally performed by good men; men of known piety and great virtue. It is true, we have seen above, that God Almighty may make use of bad men by whom to work miracles; and the bare possibility of this hinders this character from being intirely decisive on both sides; because the miracle may be true, though they want this character; yet it will easily be acknowledged, that the noted sanctity of the person who works miracles is a very great presumption in their favours; and also, that the working of miracles is a very favourable testimony of the sanctity of the one who works them; and as we have seen above, when speaking on the ends of miracles, that one of the great views Almighty God has in working them is, to testify the sanctity of his servants, and gain credit and authority to them with others; we may therefore justly conclude that, though upon certain very extraordinary occasions, he may make use of bad men by whom to do wonders, yet this is by no means the ordinary conduct of his divine providence; and that therefore, divine miracles, generally speaking,

speaking, are performed only by truly good men, and that when he who works them is of a known bad character, this raises a very great prejudice against the miracles he performs.

XX. It will be necessary, now, before I end this subject, to consider some of the objections which infidelity has started against the authority of divine miracles; but this will easily be done, as they are already all answered before-hand, from the principles I have laid down in this and the preceding chapter.

First, they object the miracles wrought among the heathens: *There is not a single historian of antiquity, says Dr Middleton, who has not recorded oracles, prodigies, prophecies and miracles; many of these are attested in the gravest manner, and by the gravest writers, and were firmly believed at the time by the populace, Free Inquiry, page 218.* Therefore, say they, as Christians themselves own no credit ought to be given to these miracles, nor to the doctrines held by those who performed them, so neither ought any credit to be given to others, such as these wrought in favours of Christianity: This is the force of the objection, if it has any at all.

In answer to this, I shall not question the fact, but allow that real prodigies have been performed among the heathens; the only question is, Were those prodigies performed by Almighty God, or by evil

evil spirits? is it possible to distinguish from what source they flowed? The rules of our criterion will at once answer these questions, and evidently show that these prodigies were the operations of Satan; for, (1.) It is plain from their very history, that they were not such as exceeded what we know to be within the reach of created power. (2.) They were not performed in the name of the true God, but in the names of a multitude of gods, and in the belief of Polytheism. (3.) The authors of these prodigies and oracles were evidently enemies to mankind, demanding on numberless occasions to be honoured with human sacrifices, and encouraging most impure rites and ceremonies, and approving the most shocking crimes, adulteries, incests, and the like. (4.) Such of these wonders among them as were the effect of art magic, were professedly done by the help of Satan, in plain opposition to the one only living and true God. These reasons evidently show, that heathen miracles were not the work of the great God; whereas the contrary reasons as manifestly prove, that the miracles wrought in favours of Christianity were undoubtedly wrought by him; and therefore, that these last must have the utmost authority, whereas the former can have none.

XXI. Secondly, they argue that miracles are but equivocal signs of the truth of doctrine; because it appears from the scriptures themselves, that  
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real miracles have been and will be performed in proof of false doctrine; thus the magicians of Egypt wrought the same miracles in proof of their falsehood, as Moses did for the truth: Thus Christ himself assures us, *that false Christs and false prophets shall arise, and shall shew signs and wonders to seduce, if possible, the very elect*, Matth. xiii. Lastly, we are assured from scripture, that even Antichrist himself will perform the most amazing prodigies in support of his impieties: Consequently, miracles, being common to true and false doctrines, can never be an absolute proof of the truth.

In answer to this objection, which infidelity endeavours to set off with great pomp and assurance, we must recall some of those principles we have seen above. The Christian religion readily grants, that superior beings can perform numberless effects in nature, which not only are miraculous with regard to man, but which are so amazingly great, that man could not certainly discover from the work itself, whether or not it were possible for any created power to perform it; but we have evidently shown and established it as an undoubted axiom, that, *if Almighty God, for his own wise ends, should at any time permit evil spirits to perform any such operations in proof of falsehood, he is bound by his own divine perfections, to give mankind sufficient means to discover the delusion, and prevent their seduction from being inevitable*, Axiom 4. And we have

have also seen in the rules of our criterion what those means are which the divine providence has provided for enabling mankind to discover true from false miracles, and distinguish the operations of God from those of Satan: We have only to apply those to the cases in the objection, and its force vanishes in an instant. I dare say, it will not be pretended, that the miracles mentioned in the objection, viz. those of the Egyptians, of the false Christs, and of Antichrist, were absolute miracles; that is, such as could be performed only by God, and which of course must be performed immediately by him: it would be ridiculous to suppose that, because it is evidently contrary to the idea we have of God, and of his divine perfections, to imagine that he can work absolute miracles against himself, and in attestation of falsehood, as we have proved at large throughout the whole of this chapter; it is therefore evident from the very objection itself, that the miracles therein referred to are only relative miracles; that they do not exceed the natural abilities of created agents, and that in fact they have the devil for their author: Hence the objection is quite out of the case, and inconclusive. What the Christian religion contends for, and we have shown at large, is, that absolute miracles which can have no other author but God, and relative miracles known to be wrought by him, or by commission from him in attestation of doctrine, are most certain and undoubted proofs that that doctrine

doctrine is his. If it could be shown that miracles of this kind were wrought also in attestation of false doctrine, then the objection would be unanswerable, and miracles, even true miracles, would be but equivocal proofs of doctrine; but as the very light of reason shows, that it is impossible that Almighty God should either perform miracles himself, or commission others to do so in attestation of falsehood, nay, as we have seen above, [Rules of Criterion], that it is impossible he should permit wicked spirits to perform any kind of miracles in proof of falsehood, when the circumstances are such, that mankind could not discover the delusion; hence the total insufficiency of the objection must appear manifest; for, if put in its proper light, it must run thus: The Egyptians, the false prophets, and Antichrist, are said in scripture to work miracles by the help of Satan to attest false doctrine; in such circumstances, however, that human reason can easily discover they are the work of Satan, and not of God; therefore, true miracles, known to be the work of God, cannot be trusted as certain proofs of the doctrine in attestation of which they are performed. Every body of the least degree of common sense, must see the weakness and total inconsistency of such an argument; and yet this is what impiety and infidelity has made a mighty work about as unanswerable. Now, that all these miracles mentioned in the objection may be evidently known to be the work of Satan,

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will easily appear by applying the rules of our criterion to them; for (1.) They are not said to be wrought in the name of the only true living God, but in downright opposition to him. (2.) Those of the Egyptians and of Antichrist are expressly declared to be done by enchantments, and by the operation of Satan. (3.) The Egyptians were at last forced to yield the day to Moses, when he performed miracles which they could not imitate, and to acknowledge that *the finger of God was there*; which was a fair confession that theirs were not done by the finger of God, but by the finger of Satan. (4.) Those of the false Christs and false prophets, and of Antichrist, will be performed in defence of a doctrine manifestly opposite to, and destructive of the known truth; *to wit*, the truths which Christ has revealed to the world, and established in the most convincing manner, by the divine miracles he wrought to attest them. (5.) These last have been plainly foretold by Jesus Christ, and we are warned by him against them; consequently, when they come to pass, that is, when false teachers arise, proposing doctrines contrary to the truths of Jesus Christ, endeavouring to lead men away from him, and performing signs and wonders to persuade men to follow them; these very signs and wonders, instead of serving their cause, are their greatest condemnation, and the most convincing proofs of the truth of the Christian religion; because they show beyond reply that Jesus Christ is God, who could foresee

foresee so long before what was to happen, and foretell it to his followers, and caution them against the danger. From these considerations it is evident that, when these things come to pass, God Almighty has provided mankind with a full and ample defence against the seduction, by which they may easily discover by whose power the signs performed by false prophets and by Antichrist are wrought; and consequently to draw an objection from these against the authority of true miracles performed by God himself, or of such as are done by commission from him, is altogether frivolous and inconclusive.

XXII. A third objection brought by infidelity against the authority of miracles is taken from the incomprehensibility of the doctrines said to be attested by them; for, say they, how can an event though ever so uncommon and extraordinary, prove a doctrine to be true, which appears to my reason to be absurd and contradictory?

This objection is founded upon the confounding of ideas, and the not adverting to where the force of the proof lies; it has been often answered to full satisfaction by those celebrated pens who have written in defence of Christianity; so I shall here only lay down briefly a clear explication of the terms, with a few observations on them, by which the weakness of the objection will at once appear.

(1.) A proposition is absurd, when the two ideas of which it is composed are contradictory and repugnant to one another, and impossible, so as formally to exclude each other; such are these: *A triangle has four corners; a gnat by its natural strength overturned a mountain; a man swallowed up the ocean; the man Peter is a millstone; a part is greater than the whole; and the like.*

(2.) In order to know for certain that two ideas are contradictory and impossible, we must of necessity be acquainted with all their properties; for if we know the objects of our ideas only in part and imperfectly, though in these their properties which we know they may appear repugnant, yet in those their other properties which we know not, there may be the most perfect harmony; and therefore we can never rationally pronounce a proposition absurd, except we thoroughly comprehend all the properties of the ideas of which it is composed. In the above examples, as we perfectly understand what is meant by a triangle, and what by a corner, at first sight we perceive the impossibility between a *triangle* and *four corners*, and so of the others; and therefore, we justly pronounce them absurd propositions. But in this other proposition, *wheat and oats may grow in the moon*, we cannot rationally pronounce it an absurd or repugnant proposition; because, though we know what is meant by wheat and oats, and have a full knowledge



knowledge of their properties, yet we have but a very imperfect idea of the moon, and little or no knowledge of its nature and properties ; and tho' perhaps, in fact, the nature of the moon be such as to be incapable of producing wheat or oats, nay to have an absolute repugnancy at any such thing growing in it ; and consequently though the above proposition be in itself absurd and repugnant, yet we cannot rationally pronounce it to be so, because of our ignorance of the nature of one of the objects of which it is composed.

(3.) Propositions, of whose terms we have but an imperfect knowledge, may either be apparently absurd and contradictory, or not : A proposition is apparently contradictory, when those properties of its parts which we know appear repugnant to one another, as when we say, *There are two lines which, though produced in infinitum, will always approach nearer, but never meet* : This, according to our ideas of the terms, seems contradictory, altho' it be a well known proposition demonstrated in conic sections. A proposition is apparently not repugnant, when there appears no contradiction between its terms, as far as we know of them ; as in the above example, *wheat may grow in the moon*, whatever contradiction may be in fact between the nature of the moon and the growth of wheat, yet, in as far as we know of the properties of wheat and the moon, such contradiction does not appear to us.

(4.) Propositions which are apparently contradictory are either comprehensible to the human understanding, or incomprehensible. They are comprehensible, when the mind of man can by study acquire a thorough knowledge of the properties of their terms, and see their truth and connection, notwithstanding the contradiction that appeared when they were only known in part : Of this kind there are numbers of examples both in the mathematics and natural philosophy, where many things when first proposed seem impossible and repugnant, till, by a further and more perfect knowledge of these objects, the repugnancy vanishes, and their connection appears. Propositions apparently contradictory are incomprehensible, when it is impossible for the human understanding, in its present natural imperfect state, to acquire a perfect and thorough knowledge of the objects of which such propositions are composed, or of their properties, ties and relations ; examples of this kind are chiefly to be found in supernatural things concerning God and eternity, where the objects are of such a nature, that it is impossible for man in his present state to have a clear and perfect knowledge of them and of their properties. Take for example this proposition : *God is immense and perfectly present every where without extension or parts.* According to the knowledge we have of the terms here used, this seems impossible ; nor are we capable in our present state to acquire such

a knowledge of the nature of God, and of place and of extension, as to see and comprehend the connection that is between them in this proposition, which is therefore to us incomprehensible: In like manner, when we say, *In one and the self-same divine nature there are three persons, really distinct among themselves, so that we can say of the one, what we cannot say of the other;* this also, according to the imperfect idea we have of the terms used, *that is*, of the divine nature and of the divine persons, seems a contradiction; nor is it possible for us in this life to acquire such a thorough knowledge of these objects, as to see and comprehend the perfect union and harmony that are between them.

(5.) Propositions, though in appearance contradictory, may yet in themselves be perfectly true, whether they be comprehensible to us or not. That a finite space, for example, may be divided into an infinite number of smaller spaces, appears at first sight a manifest contradiction, yet the truth of it is proved by a geometrical demonstration; that the leg of a parabola and a streight line produced in their respective directions, will always approach nearer and nearer to one another, but never meet; though in appearance it seems plainly repugnant and impossible, yet it is a well known property of the parabola, and the truth of it is also proved to a demonstration in conic sections. The



same thing may also be shown in many other truths, both in natural philosophy and in the mathematics : And though in these examples we are convinced of the truth of the proposition, notwithstanding its apparent contradiction, and cannot refuse our assent to the evidence of the demonstration ; yet we cannot possibly comprehend how it should be so, nor acquire such a full and perfect idea of the objects as to see and comprehend the relation and connection between them. In like manner in supernatural things, that the superb fabric of the universe should be created out of nothing, without any pre-existent matter of which to be formed, seems, according to our imperfect ideas, so contradictory and repugnant, that human reason, unassisted by revelation, had laid it down as an incontestible maxim, that “ nothing can be produced from nothing,” *Ex nihilo nihil fit*; yet we know for certain, from the testimony of God himself, that this was actually the case ; that the whole visible creation was created by him out of nothing, by the sole act of his almighty will ; nay, human reason itself, being assisted by the light of revelation, can now demonstrate the impossibility of a pre-existent uncreated matter ; however incomprehensible then the creation of the world may be, however contradictory it may appear to our weak reason, yet it is most certainly true in itself, nor can the truth of it with any colour of reason be called in question by any Christian. In like manner these following

following propositions, *There is a first cause of all things, which had no cause of itself: There is a being which neither made itself, nor was made by any other; God is immense without extension; God fills every place, yet is confined to no place; the soul of man is in every part of the body, and yet is neither multiplied nor divided among the several parts of the body; and numbers such, from the weak and imperfect knowledge we have of these objects, seem to us at first sight impossible, and are to our weak capacity incomprehensible; and yet the very Deists themselves are obliged to acknowledge them to be true and incontestible.* It is plain then that propositions, in appearance contradictory and incomprehensible to us, may yet in themselves be perfectly true, and many such are undoubtedly true both in natural and supernatural things, as we have seen in the above examples.

(6.) We acquire an absolute certainty of the truth of many propositions which are in appearance impossible and contradictory, even though we be incapable of comprehending the nature and properties of their objects, or of perceiving in these objects themselves their connection with one another. This is evident from all the above examples, the truth of which we know most assuredly, tho' it be impossible for us in our present natural state to acquire a full knowledge and comprehension of their objects. We do not see the immediate connection between the objects themselves, because  
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our ideas of them are too imperfect, and therefore it is not properly from the intrinsic evidence that we know the truth of these propositions, but it is either from external demonstration that this can be had, or from the undoubted testimony of those who are perfectly acquainted with the truth of them. Thus a scholar may be fully certain of the truth of the proposition, that *there are two lines, which being produced in infinitum, will be always approaching, but never meet*, either by attending to the known properties of the parabola, and the demonstration thence drawn to prove it, or by giving credit to the authority and testimony of his master, who assures him of it.

(7.) In supernatural things the testimony of God himself is the most assured means to come to the knowledge of the truth of such propositions as seem to our weak reason contradictory, and are to us in our present state incomprehensible. To comprehend and have adequate ideas of supernatural objects is far above the reach of our natural capacity; our ideas of them are exceedingly limited and imperfect, and their nature and properties are quite of a different kind from what we are acquainted with in natural objects; consequently there must be innumerable truths concerning them, which we can never comprehend in our present state; nay, which according to our unlimited ideas may appear absurd and contradictory: But Almighty God perfectly well comprehends the nature



ture of all these things ; he knows all their properties, and sees all their ties, connections, and relations of whatever kind : On the other hand, he is a being of infinite veracity, and can never possibly deceive his creatures ; if, therefore, he reveals to man any proposition concerning himself or supernatural objects, which seems to us contradictory, and which in our present state we cannot comprehend, yet this testimony must give us the most assured conviction that what he so reveals is most undoubtedly true ; nay, it is by his testimony alone that we can come to any certain knowledge of these matters.

(8.) By the word *mystery* in the Christian religion is understood *a proposition revealed by God, concerning himself or other supernatural objects, the truth of which we cannot perceive in the objects themselves, by reason of our limited and imperfect knowledge of them, which proposition is therefore to us incomprehensible, and may in some cases appear contradictory.* The possibility of a mystery as here explained is plain from all the above reasoning ; that God may reveal to man truths concerning himself and supernatural things, is not called in question ; that these truths must be in numberless cases above the comprehension of our mind is self-evident ; that the limited and imperfect ideas we have of these objects, may in some cases appear to us contradictory, though the objects are far from being so in themselves, is plain from this, because  
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we see this is often the case in natural things when we have but an imperfect knowledge of them; but that the testimony of God revealing them is the most convincing proof that they are true, notwithstanding such apparent contradiction, is a necessary consequence of his perfect knowledge of these objects, and of his infinite veracity.

XXIII. If now we apply these observations to the objection raised against the authority of miracles, from the nature of the doctrine attested by them, we shall easily see the weakness and fallacy of it; for if the doctrines proposed as true by revelation, and attested by miracles, were about objects which fall under our comprehension, of which we had full and adequate ideas, and between which ideas we evidently saw an absolute repugnancy and contradiction; as for example, should we suppose a miracle wrought to prove that *a part is greater than the whole*, or that *a man is a millstone*, or such like, which, from the adequate ideas we have of these objects, are evident absurdities; then it will be candidly acknowledged that no miracle whatever could ever be of any authority to render such doctrine credible; but then it is no less evident to common sense that a true and divine miracle never was, and never will be performed in attestation of such a doctrine. The doctrines proposed by revelation as objects of our belief, are all concerning supernatural things, of whose properties

perties we have but very limited and imperfect ideas ; although then in the weak ideas we have of them there may appear any contradiction, we cannot on that account assert that they are in themselves contradictory ; nay, by what we have seen above, many doctrines, even in natural things, are true notwithstanding such apparent contradictions ; much more must this be the case in supernatural things : As, therefore, we are not capable by the utmost reach of the human mind to investigate the truth of these supernatural objects, or demonstrate it by reason, the only possible way to come to the knowledge of them is by revelation from God, and if God reveals them, and attests that revelation by divine miracles, it is evident there cannot be a greater or more convincing proof, both that such revelation is from God, and that the doctrine so revealed is most certainly true, however contradictory it may appear to us from our imperfect ideas of its objects. Hence then it appears that the fallacy of the objection lies in confounding *a mystery* and *an absurdity* ; which it supposes to be synonymous terms, but which we have seen to be extremely different ; and also in supposing that a miracle can be wrought, or is pretended to be wrought by God, in attestation of a doctrine evidently absurd and contradictory, which supposition is itself a most manifest absurdity.

XXIV. Before we conclude this chapter, it will not be amiss to consider the different cases that



that may be supposed between miracles and the doctrine attested by them, which will put this matter in the clearest light, and lay the whole of it before the eye in one view.

*Case 1. If a miracle, known for certain to be from God, be wrought in attestation of a doctrine evidently false or impious.* In this supposition all authority of miracles would be destroyed; but this is a case which, as we have seen above, is manifestly impossible.

*Case 2. If the doctrine be evidently good, but the miracle dubious.* In this case, though the goodness of the doctrine does not absolutely prove the miracle to be from God, yet it is a strong presumption in its favours, and greatly corroborates the other proofs that may be brought for its being a divine miracle.

*Case 3. If the miracle be evidently from God, but the doctrine itself dubious;* then the miracle absolutely proves the doctrine to be true, and intirely removes all manner of doubt that might otherwise be entertained concerning it.

*Case 4. If the doctrine be undoubtedly bad, and contrary to the known truth;* the miracle wrought in its favour is undoubtedly a false miracle, and done by the operation of Satan.

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.

